

Roundabout's Coronavirus Parents Guide to Returning Back to Primary School...



How to ease your child back into the classroom.

For some children going back to school or going to a new school will be an exciting experience – but for some children the thought of going back to school may be making them feel anxious, worried, scared and perhaps fearful. Most children will be going back to a school that is familiar to them, where it will be the same but different. For those children that will be moving into reception, Year 7 or will be transferring to a brand new school the unfamiliar may be overwhelming. Your child may not have had the opportunity to say goodbye to their old school, to old friends, teachers and staff and they may have concerns about meeting the new teachers and making new friends. There will be a lot of changes happening which may bring up lots of different mixed feelings...

If your child has not returned to school as yet or may be beginning to feel anxious again after coming back from the summer holidays, we at Roundabout have provided some ways to prepare your child for their transition back to school. To support you we have created different ways and ideas to help ease and introduce your child's return. There are also creative resources and activities which we hope will help you to build their self-confidence and support your child so that they can return and have a positive experience.

Re-establishing relationships...

Schools are going to look and feel different. Your school may have already communicated to you via an email or on their website with their proposed changes. If you have not heard it may also be worth checking with the school what measures they will have in place. When schools re-open it will be a new and challenging experience for pupils, parents and school staff.

The relationship with you and your child's school

It is important that we work together to prepare as much as we can for a successful transition. We must be aware that the experience will be different for everyone, but there are a few key factors which will be helpful to consider for everyone in preparation for the 'new normal'.

Your child and their friends...

Your child may be looking forward to seeing all their friends again. They may also be anxious, nervous and scared. Do try and get excited for your child and encourage them to get excited that they will be able to get back into a structured routine with their friends. Get in touch with other parents either via the school or you may already be in a WhatsApp or Facebook group. It may be helpful for your child if you encourage them when thinking about their return back to school, about the exciting opportunity they will have to see and spend more time with their friends again in person. You may want to get into contact with other parents to support your child's relationships with their friends. If you are not in contact with other school parents already the school may be able to help facilitate these communications.

Six people from different households or in larger groups if everyone is exclusively from one or two households and members of up to two households can socialise indoors (at the time of preparing this document on 11/08/2020). Arrange to meet up and reconnect with school friends who are going to be in the same bubble. Government advice has now changed so we can now stay one metre apart from each other. Your child may need reassurance and you may find they may be more emotional, shy or clingy. This is very natural and these feelings will settle in time.

Should meeting up in person not be possible, then you may wish to explore contact with other parents at school to facilitate your children to be in contact with their school friend's over supervised telephone or video calls.

Introducing the new Class Teacher...

From September children will be moving up a year group and in many cases they will be having a new class teacher, teaching assistant and perhaps a new key-worker. If your child is not in Reception, Year 1 or 6 and has not already returned, your school may allow your child to visit during the last week of the summer term. If this is not an option you could ask for a virtual meeting with your child's teacher, the pastoral care teacher or the school's SENCO.

If this is not practical, you could ask for a member of staff to take a few photos of key places in the school. If you are able to download a photo of their new teacher and TA from the schools website you could create a fun visual poster that could be visible in your house.

Visual Timetable

A visual timetable helps to explain the structure of a day using pictures, symbols and words. It can help develop an understanding of timetabled activities throughout the day. A clear understanding of the day's schedule and knowing what comes next can reduce children's anxieties and promote a sense of safety.

It can also help a person to understand feelings and emotions about how they felt in the past, present and future as a way to support emotional intelligence and well-being.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning							
Afternoon							
Evening							

On our website we have other example templates that you may find useful or you may also want to create your own version. These are available [here](#)

In the week before school starts you could encourage your child to use a visual timetable with a countdown calendar marking the days remaining until their return. This may support your child with the transition and may help to relax and calm the mind – for a download of the visual timetable click [here](#)

Helping Your Child to Feel Calm through Relaxation Techniques

The key priority both at school and home will be the safety and well-being of your child. In preparation for returning back you may find some relaxation techniques that your child may find helpful. Mindfulness breathing and meditation are beautiful ways to relax a busy mind, calm nervous feelings and to help your child recharge and rejuvenate.

A short '**Guided Meditation**' video for parents, carers and staff is available to access click [here](#)

'**Star Breathing Chart**' to help your child to relax and focus, to access this click [here](#)



Calming boxes

Find a box (a shoe box is an ideal size) and let your child decorate, paint or stick pictures, gems and feathers on it. With your help, your child can fill the box with things that will help to reduce anxiety and support them to feel calm. Calming boxes can be left in a place where your child can access it if they are feeling worried or anxious.



Bubbles are great as children can focus on their breath as they blow bubbles. Lotions and hand cream work particularly well as they focus on the two senses smell and touch (massage). Play dough, plasticine and soft balls are great stress relievers when a child feel frustrated or angry.

Relaxation games

Games like the 'sleeping lion' is a great way to support your child to be still and calm. The aim of the game is to get your child or ideally children with or without other adults to lie down and pretend to be a sleeping lion. See who can remain still the longest to be granted the title 'Sleepiest Lion'.

With a group the parent, or designated child can walk around the 'sleeping lions' to see who will stir first. Sometimes this game is made more playful by the person walking around the lions also trying to encourage them to wake, by telling jokes for example. The sleepy lions are not to be touched or tickled awake.

Den Building

Building a Den with blankets, pillows and sheets can offer your child a creative activity in the building of their den, as well as a cozy and containing place to rest, read, and play. Many children find that the containing sensory feedback of a den can support their sense of safety and relaxation.

For a simple den building guide, [Click Here](#)

Mindfulness hand massages

Massages on the hands, fingers and wrists allow your child to relax, calm and helps to slow their breathing. This is a great way for you to connect with your child and the massage will help them to decrease their stress and anxieties. Using lotions and/or hand cream with massage enables your child to focus on two of their senses smell and touch massage. Lavender, Eucalyptus, Peppermint and Geranium oils scents can help to soothe, calm and relax.

These mindful moments spent together will not only be supportive for your child, but will also work to support your own wellbeing, supporting positive communication and relationship for both parent and child.

Below are different types of massages for the fingers and hands that you can use with your child, that Dramatherapist Lucy Joy has gathered and shared from her experience as a Dramatherapist working alongside and in partnership with Occupational Therapists. They will help your child to manage their worries and anxieties, enabling them to find ways to soothe and calm. You could offer these massages for them, or show them how to do them themselves, to support self-soothing and regulation.

Anxiety massage – massage your thumb to help you manage anxiety

Courage massage – Massage your first finger to help you feel more courageous and manage fears

Calm massage – Massage your middle finger to help manage your anger and to feel cool

Self-esteem Massage – Massage your little finger to help you improve your confidence and self-esteem.

Comfort Massage – Massage your wrists. There are points on your wrists that help you manage anxiety and worry.

Worry massage – Rub your fingernails against each other briskly back and forth. This can stimulate certain areas of your brain, which can help with anxiety or worry.

Roundabout Advice and Support:

It is important to be kind to ourselves and others: prioritizing emotional well-being is essential for successful adaptation to the 'new normal'. It can be helpful to focus on the present moment, and day, and adapt/adjust to the news that it brings.

In this current climate and time period where we are no re-assured with the clear knowledge of what to expect, practicing mindfulness and staying within the present moment where we do have autonomy is helpful for our general wellbeing. There are steps we can take to support ourselves and others during this time. Roundabout is also here to support school communities and families.

Coping with loss and Bereavement

For children who have experienced and have been impacted by loss, within the home/family or wider community it is really important that they are supported at home and at school to help **them** understand and process what has happened.

Do give your child opportunities to discuss and express their feelings around the bereavement, grief and loss. As parents/carers sometimes we may wish to shield our young people from these topics to protect them, however without your support to better understand grief and loss, children's imaginations can fill in the gaps, and this can sometimes be more frightening than the reality.

It can be helpful to speak to young people about grief and loss in age appropriate language, and to keep things simple and honest.

Our Roundabout dramatherapists working in schools can support young people experiencing bereavement. Please do be in touch with your school, or our Roundabout offices to explore this further.

Do address your own worries around loss, grief and bereavement and if you need support the following links may be helpful.

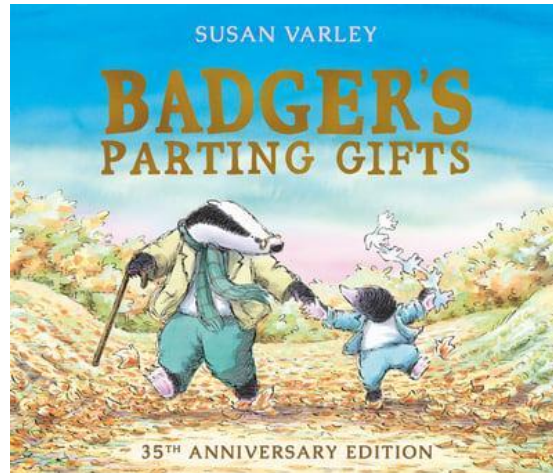
Cruse Bereavement Care: Bereavement Support for Adults

www.cruse.org.uk

Childhood Bereavement Network: Help Around A Death

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/help-around-a-death.aspx>

Badger's Parting Gifts by Susan Varley is a picture book that helps children to deal with bereavement.



Anxiety

The world your child once knew may feel different following their experience of Covid-19 and the changes that occurred in order to keep people safe. School's; often a familiar and consistent venue for our children were closed to many young people over the past months. As a result your child may be feeling anxious about their return. There are different types of anxiety, below we will outline two types, social and separation, which may impact your child during this time.

Social Anxiety

Some children will look forward to returning to school but find aspects of being around others frightening and overwhelming.

Social distancing has led to increased anxiety for some children in their interaction with others in the outside world. Do empathize and encourage your child to open verbally or in non verbal way. The Feelings and Emotions Facial Expressions Stones by Yellow Door is a great way to start a conversation.



Separation anxiety

A lot of children have become used to having their parents or carers around 24/7. Now that adults are returning back to work, the impending thought of children slowing returning back to school could increase the potential for them to have separation anxiety.

Although many children will be eager to regain their freedom and see their friends, it may also be a potential source of anxiety for them. School staff should be aware of these anxieties, and will support pupils sensitively to manage their concerns.

You might find that your child may be clinging onto you, wanting to be closer in physical proximity to you. They could also be more emotional and tearful; do give them lots of reassurance and cuddles to support them. In time with yourself and the school's support they will begin to feel more settled.

A beautiful book about separation anxiety is 'The Invisible String' by Patrice Karst



You can listen to the story [here](#)

Children of Key-workers

For those of you whose children have been attending school throughout the lockdown you may find that your child may start to struggle with many more children in school and bubble/group arrangements. During the lock-down period they were amongst the only children who were able to access school. These children had the whole school to themselves where they built strong relationships with teachers that they may not have worked with before. Their relationship may have been less formal and more flexible and suddenly more children are coming back and there are new rules and restrictions are being put in place. The new rules will mean that access to some parts of the school may no longer be available. Do open up a conversation with your child about the feelings that emerge and what may be the same and different when they return after the summer.

How do we support and encourage an anxious child who is refusing to go back to school?

Some children may feel very anxious about returning to school and may refuse to go back. They may have enjoyed the comfort of being safe at home and the thought of going back is making them anxious. You may also (understandably) be anxious about your child going back to school. What will it be like for them. Are they going to be safe?

Some parents might be looking forward to their child returning which in turn may cause your child to feel anxious and refusing to return. After spending so much time together your child may feel rejected by your encouraging them to return to school.

By offering them support, empathy and reassurance and responding positively to any questions you can help to ease their anxiety. Showing and offering support and letting your child know that it is perfectly okay to feel like this and let them know many children will be feeling this way too may help them to feel calmer. You may also find that other parents in your community are experiencing the same feelings and you could offer to support one another.

Roundabout are also here to support you during this difficult time as outlined below.

Roundabout's Phone Consultation Service

Roundabout has created a service offering a limited number of one hour consultation slots each week. The telephone consultation service is available until the October half term, and offers appointments on Tuesday afternoons and Thursday mornings during term-time . It is run by Emma Ramsden, one of Roundabout's dramatherapy specialists.

Booking a phone consultation:

A consultation can be booked in advance by completing and submitting this online form. Please provide a brief outline of your inquiry. To proceed, click [here](#)

How to access Roundabout's Dramatherapy services

Do get in touch with Roundabout by contacting the office via our **contact** page, email or telephone. We will discuss with you what Roundabout can offer and explain how we work. Once funding is in place, we will identify a dramatherapist from our team of 27 creative dramatherapists, who offer a range of specialisms.

To see our standard fees, click **here**. To see our school fees, click **here**.

Keeping everyone safe – the same but different...

Discuss with your child together things that will be the same about school and things that will be different.

Below are suggestions of some of the differences you and your child may experience which may help you to identify themes to discuss with:

- As you enter the school there may be new unfamiliar signposts about social distancing rules and only allowing one parent per child to drop off and collect from the school gate.
- As you enter the school someone may be at the gates checking your temperature each day.
- Most children may not be going back to a full-time timetable. Make a visual timetable of the days that they will be in. Include the teacher who will be in their bubble. For a Now, next, then, visual template – click [here](#)
- Bubbles or Pods – Find out as much information about your child's 'bubble' or 'pod'. Will they be with their friends? How many children will be in their bubble or pod. Which member of staff will they be with them? Will they be with the same children and the same staff? If you are on a group WhatsApp or other online platform with other parents in your child's class you could find out who will be in your child's bubble.
- There will probably be a different layout in the classroom with all chairs facing the teacher and desks set apart.
- There may be a different teacher and your child may stay in the same classroom for the whole duration of the day.
- One way walking traffic system in the corridors for children and staff to maintain safe distances when moving around the school.
- Staggered breaks and start and end times
- No whole school assemblies
- Outside classes
- Cough and sneeze hygiene, click [here](#)

- Changes in school staff's approach to behaviour support for children in school
- More frequent washing of hands. To ease your child's anxieties they may find it helpful to know that hand washing can help you to feel in control of what's going on.

Do reassure your child that all these measures make it much safer for children to return to school.

Worry Jar

Going back to school may bring up all sorts of feelings. Mealtimes are a really good time to sit around with the family to discuss any worries, concerns, fears or anxieties. Each worry can be placed into a jar. Go through the day asking open questions, how did you feel about your bubble group? What did you find most difficult at school today. Look back on your child's day. Invite them to think, if they had a magic wand what would they change.

Favourite part of the day –

At bath-time or bedtime focus on your child's favourite part of the day. You could join in and share your favourite part of the day and include your favourite part of your child's day - for example I was so proud of you today because...

Remember to take care of yourself –

At Roundabout we are aware of the huge difficulties and challenges faced by many parents/carers and their children. One of the most important things is to look after you and to take each day as it comes. Looking after your own well-being and self-care is incredibly important.

In order to be able to best care for our children and loved ones, we must also be nourishing and caring for ourselves. If we are always giving to others and neglecting our own needs, we will soon be less robust in the support we are able to give. Check-in with yourself to ensure that your own needs are being met, and if you find that they are not take steps to remedy this.

Everyone is different, and therefore we may all find different things helpful in supporting our own self-care. Below are a few suggestions:

Time spent in nature, exercise, nourishing our bodies with healthy food, sharing laughter with our loved ones, shared play/activity with loved ones, meditation, reading or watching something you enjoy, writing in a journal, comfortable sensory experiences like wrapping yourself in a cozy blanket with a cup of tea or having a warm bath, reach out for support of a friend, family member, or therapist.

We hope that you have found this information helpful in supporting you at this challenging time.

We are here to support you.