Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Helping Your Kids Adjust to Going Back to School After Lockdown

The lockdown has been a challenging time for families as children and their parents have had to work out how to balance school, work, and play while dealing with anxieties and worries about the pandemic.

Similarly, returning to school presents its own challenges and adjustments for the entire family. However, by planning ahead, you can help your child make the adjustment into their school routine and ease them into any changes that it may bring.

Preparing your child mentally for the transition back to school

Returning to the school environment and reuniting with friends after lockdown may be exciting to your child, but it may also make them feel like they are suddenly being plunged back into an intense situation. Talk to them about what they are looking forward to and what concerns they may have about going back to school.

Act as a sounding board. Try to listen without immediately offering opinions or advice. Sometimes just talking about a problem or issue can help children come up with solutions of their own.

Take your child's concerns seriously. Remember how demanding academic and social pressure can be even without adding in the additional stress of returning after a lockdown. Be careful not to belittle their concerns nor trivialise them.

Share some of the feelings and experiences you're going through where appropriate. Speaking in an age-appropriate way about your own worries about the relaxation of lockdown rules and what you are doing to help you cope may create an open environment to help your child share their own thoughts and concerns.

Keep talking to your child about anything and everything. Grab opportunities to discuss important issues, but also ask simple questions like, "How was your day?" Do everything you can to maintain a strong bond and keep the lines of communication open so they feel that they can openly and honestly discuss things with you.

Make it a priority to motivate them to learn. When they return to the classroom, show that you are as curious and interested in what your child is learning as you were about their home-schooling work. Encourage them by giving specific, concrete praise such as "I really like your detail in this project," rather than a general comment of "You're such a great student." This indicates to your child that you have made an effort and noticed their efforts.

Work with your child's school. Don't be afraid to ask for help**.** Let the school know if you're worried about anything in particular, or if you child could benefit from extra help in making the transition back from home to school.

If your child is struggling with the transition back to school after lockdown, contact your Employee Assistance Programme to speak to a caring counsellor who can offer you support.

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Practical steps to make the transition easier

Being prepared for the transition back to school means that there should be one less thing for you and your child to worry about. Here are some pointers on what you could consider in preparation for the first day back:

Help your child start getting to bed earlier the week before school begins again. This is never easy but brings benefits for both parent and child.

Brush up on reading and maths together. This may help ease your child into learning, refreshing them to the point where they left off and should make the transition into the classroom less anxiety provoking for them.

Check your child's school's website. Look for announcements about last-minute changes and reminders about upcoming events or any specific items that the school may wish your child to have.

Get their school uniform ready, making sure it still fits, check PE kit too. Leaving this until last minute can cause unwanted stress on the day!

Shop for groceries in advance of the first week back. You may also want to plan meals ahead of time including packed lunches.

Work out before- and after-school care. Remember that, although children may be heading back to school, your regular care options may not be available yet.

Confirm any lift-sharing or transport arrangements.

Consider working a shorter day on the first day of school to ease the transition. This will allow you to see your child off to school in the morning and to be there after school to talk about the first day's events. Do something fun to mark the transition back to school like enjoying a special family meal together.

Know your options at work. Go over your company's policies regarding time off so you'll know what your options are in an emergency. You may also want to let your manager know that your child is making the transition back to work in case you need to request a temporary flexible working arrangement.

Rebuilding your child's confidence and motivation after the time away during lockdown will be a gradual process. Take it at their pace and build on any small steps made. By planning ahead and talking things through together, in an age appropriate manner, you can support and help them understand that working hard in school is a worthwhile investment for their future career and life.