

A Guide for Parents and Carers - Help support your child's return to school

Many children feel stressed and anxious about returning to school after the long summer break. There are a variety of reasons why pupils feel like this:

- Who will be teaching me?
- What if I have forgotten everything?
- What if I don't do as well in tests are my parents/teachers expect me to do?
- What if my friends don't speak to me?
- How will I cope?
- What if I get lost going to my lessons?

Anxiety is a normal feeling that we all experience at times in our lives. On many occasions, we manage our anxiety and stress and keep it under control. However, sometimes anxiety takes over our thoughts and we struggle to manage our emotions, leading to significant impact on many aspects of our lives. In order to prevent this, we can take action in simple tasks to deal with specific issues.

Here are some useful ways you can work with your children throughout the summer, to help reduce their anxiety, which will help them on their return to school:

It is important to talk about school — it is a daily part of a young person's life and your child will have to come back at some point. Try to focus on the positive aspects of school, such as seeing friends, lessons your child is good at or an activity that she particularly enjoys. Another strategy, which can be useful, is

Walking passed the school gates when you are out and about, to start to familiarise your child again with the environment.

Listen to what your child is saying about school — do not ignore her concerns or suggest that they are not real. Do listen to her worries, acknowledge that you have an understanding of her difficulties and try to reassure her. Try not to contradict everything your child says or give too much advice but rather encourage her to try to come up with her own solutions to problems. In addition, a child will notice any worries that you may have and this may have an impact on their anxiety. Try to remain calm at all times, even when your child is upset, be firm but caring, and avoid losing your temper.

Friends and socialising are a vital part of the life of a young person. Friendships can provide support to children who are struggling or simply make it life easier and more enjoyable for them at school. You can encourage better relationships with friends, by supporting your child to meet up and do activities with friends or having others over to your house for dinner/sleepovers. Friends can also be utilised to support your child getting into school; for example, she can meet up with them to get the bus into school on a morning.

Sleep can become a big concern during the school holidays. A young person can get out of a good sleep routine very quickly, staying up late and lying in bed for most of the day. Do try to get your child back into a proper sleep routine a few weeks before returning to school, encouraging them to go to bed earlier by half an hour each evening.

All holidays eventually have to end, but being organised and prepared can help your child's transition into school. Try to be organised early, with uniform, school bag, etc and ensure that everything is prepared the night before, so she is not panicking on the first morning of school. You can also involve

your child in purchasing new items she may need for school towards the end of the holiday, to help her feel part of the process.

Consider getting your child to write down her worries. This can be particularly useful for a young person who finds it difficult to express her feelings in words. You can share this information with her, if she agrees, and also encourage her to share it with a trusted member of staff at school.

Do contact school and let them know if you are struggling. There are always some staff in school during the holidays and they will be able to pass your message on to the relevant person, who can contact you prior to your child's return. It may be that your child could have some time out, if required, during lessons or check in with an identified member of staff at the beginning of the day.

If you feel that your child's anxiety is becoming a major cause for concern, you may need to access some professional help. School can help you to make a referral to the appropriate organisation or you can make an appointment and speak to your GP. There is also plenty of advice available online or resources that you may find useful.

USEFUL WEBSITES:

www.kooth.com

www.annafreud.org

www.mind.org.uk

www.nhs.uk

www.youngminds.org.uk

www.place2be.org.uk

