

How to support your child in returning back to Ashley Primary School

It is helpful to recognise that the pandemic has triggered heightened emotions such as stress, anxiety and worry to an extent in us all. This is because there has been a danger and a risk identified and linked to this.

Even on the return to school some of those feelings may still be surfacing and very much present for your children. “Children will only learn if they feel safe” and it is extremely important that together both school and home work in connection to ensure this can happen.



Education serves a far more important purpose than just academic learning. It can actually transform the lives of children.

At Ashley Primary School we will continue to be a nurturing and emotionally supportive environment for all. When it comes to the reality of your child returning to school this may trigger an emotional and heightened response for them.

Children who are already overwhelmed will be triggered more easily and will find this transition difficult to manage.



Some things to look out for

- ☐ A need to be close to a familiar adult
- ☐ Seeking more adult contact (physically/emotionally)
- ☐ Refusal to leave parents/carer's
- ☐ Refusal to go into school
- ☐ Irritability/defiance/ anger outbursts
- ☐ Difficulty concentrating/ focussing
- ☐ Difficulty sleeping
- ☐ Unable to self-regulate (calm themselves)
- ☐ Quiet and withdrawn
- ☐ Avoidant of contact
- ☐ Regressive behaviour (thumb sucking, clothes chewing, soiling)

Remember that beneath every behaviour there is a feeling or a need. It is important that we recognise and meet the need rather than focussing on the behaviour. By doing this we deal with the cause not the symptom.

It is crucial that children are seen, supported and understood. 55% of the way we communicate is through our body language. Therefore you need to be alert to how your child is feeling and make the experience manageable for them. They need to feel safe. Adults should demonstrate being connected to the child through play and positivity.



They should be curious and show a genuine interest in the child and how they are feeling (I wonder, I imagine and I notice) These phrases will support you to find out what is going on for them.

Finally use empathy and let the child know that you understand (*"You know that sounds really hard"*)

Top tips:

- **Start talking** - Discuss the return to school and identify how this feels for your child. Exploring any worries that may arise. You are then able to help them manage and solve their worries.
- **Listen and acknowledge feelings without judgement.** Reassure them that their feelings are natural and that you are there for them. Remember all children are individual and will experience things in their own way. Some suggested questions to use as a conversation starter could be: What are you looking forward to? What might be hard? What do you think will be ok?
- **Prepare them** - Preparing children for change is always helpful. Involving them so they are aware in advance of when and why things will happen. As well as preparing them, this will help them make sense of the world around them and eliminate any surprises. This supports children to feel safe and secure.
- **Routine** - Implementing a good routine to support children to wake up early and adjust gradually so they can be ready for their school day well in advance of their return.
- **Sleep routine** - Start to get your child into a good sleep routine a few weeks before they are to return to school.
- **Talk about school** - Remind them of the routine that they were once familiar with. Acknowledge what has happened - It is important to recognise what we have all been through over the past few months. Do not avoid talking about this.
- **Reconnect with friends** - Help them to reconnect with some school friends if possible. This can be virtually or meeting following government guidelines.
- **Model coping strategies** - the use of breathing techniques, grounding exercises, physical exercise, journaling etc. Make yourself available - Create regular opportunities for talking in different ways. This could be when you are out for a walk, baking together or during quiet time before bed.
- **Identify positives** - Talk about what your child is looking forward to and help them to identify things they used to enjoy at school. Focus on looking to the future with confidence. Offer lots of reassurance.
- **Be mindful** - getting them to focus on the present (right here right now) Not dwelling on the past or speculating about the future as this can make worries worse.
- **Arts and crafts** - Creative arts are a great way to help us express feelings. Get your child to show you how they are feeling through the use of paint, drawing, writing, sand, playdough, pompoms etc
- **Self-care** - Offer relaxation opportunities and quiet time. A nice bubble bath, massage, stories, meditation stories, build a den to relax in, breathing practice etc.

→**Keep talking** - Once your child is back to school ask and be interested about their day. What was good about your day? What was difficult? What went ok? This breaks it down for the child and gives them a direction.

Remember to be repetitive and continuous with your support strategies, until you can see them feel settled again.