SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD RETURNING TO SCHOOL

Parents Plus & Parents First Psychology Led Service

Returning to school is the next pandemic parenting challenge. New research finds that half of UK parents feel uncomfortable with children returning to school after the Covid-19 lockdown (University of Oxford, 2020).

With this in mind, managing parental worry about this is an important first step in supporting children's return to school. Being calm, positive and supportive about the return to school will help you and your child prepare.

Things to think about:

- **Prepare them for what to expect** - Gather information from the school regarding what will be different and what will be the same. Help them see what their day will look like.

- **Routine -** Routines and predictability provide a sense of safety for children. Start to plan for changes in routine at home (e.g. does bedtime need to change?).

- **Be available.** Allow your child to talk through their worries and think about what they will do. Listen. Ask open questions e.g. 'I wonder how you feel about…'

- **Validate feelings.** Reassure them that worry is normal when any change happens and children will have lots of different feelings about going back to school.

- **Problem solving.** Talk about feeling worried and model ways to help yourself at times when you feel anxious. Have a plan for what to do. Discuss ideas on how to overcome their concerns – problem solve together.

- **Look forward.** Make a list of all the positive things about going back to school. Encourage time to think about what they are looking forward to.

- **Connection.** Help your child re-connect with friends and teachers in any way possible.

- **Avoid pressure.** Do not worry about your child being behind with learning or not having kept up with home schooling. Getting back to school is enough.

- **Communicate with school.** Let them know how your child has been during the lockdown period and any changes that have happened.

WHAT IF MY CHILD WAS HAVING DIFFICULTIES AT SCHOOL BEFORE THE LOCKDOWN?

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For these children and young people it is really important to establish predictability and maintain exposure towards going to school, and to help them problem solve and try out solutions to their worries prior to starting. Here are some ideas to help you do this:

- If possible, walk or drive past their school as part of your daily exercise.

- Practice the school run.

- Consider contacting the school and asking for contact with familiar teachers or staff using online platforms or telephone .

- Talk to the staff who were supporting your child before lockdown. Ask what they think would help.

- Talk through what will happen; what the day will look like; who they will see to help prepare for what to expect.

- Talk to your child about who they can turn to if they are feeling worried in school and specific ways in which they can do this.

- Help your child to problem solve by bullet pointing all the aspects of school they are worried about and brainstorming solutions together. Encourage your child to give solutions as independently as possible. Rate the solutions given and develop a plan of how the most favoured solutions can be put into place.

- Find ways to reassure your child that you will be thinking of them during the day.

- Use a transition object (i.e. something small from home) if they are particularly anxious. Check this with the school.

- Plan something nice to look forward to after