

Returning to School

(Key Information for Parents)

Jersey Psychology and Wellbeing Service

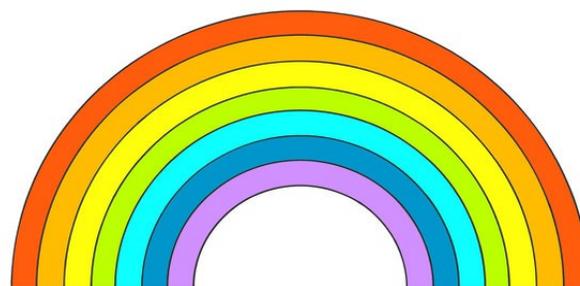
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As children return to school, their **wellbeing** is the highest priority for their teachers and the support agencies that support them.

Many aspects of their lives changed during the time they had to stay at home and every child will have processed these changes slightly differently. The emotions they experienced and the way they managed them will also have been unique to them.

They may have worried about the health of the people they care about or whether they will ever catch up with learning. On the other hand, they may have really enjoyed spending time at home with loved ones and if they have had hectic social lives, being able to relax a little more.

Returning to school may provoke a range of new emotions for them, even if they are looking forward to seeing their friends and teachers again and the safety of routines and structured days. They may feel both excited and vulnerable at the same time.



In this document:

- Prepare children for a return to school
- Further reading
- Additional useful resources
- Social story - returning to school

It is important to recognise that most children have resilience, and that their initial responses to returning to school will be normal responses to an abnormal situation. These may change over the next few days and weeks and it is unlikely that many will require additional emotional support, following a period of adjustment to returning to school. For some children, this will feel like our return to school and work following the extended summer holidays and they will be excited to return.

Children build resilience through many experiences inside and outside the classroom, within their homes and with their families. We know staying at home has caused different challenges, for example, school events/exams/transitions have been paused or cancelled. Children may also have questions regarding their learning. Issues such as these may have caused feelings of disappointment or worry and all children will be reacting differently as we consider what the 'new normal' looks like for us all.

Although some of these feelings can be difficult to cope with, it is important to keep in mind that such experiences can develop important life skills and opportunity for problem solving. As children begin settling back at school, research shows that helping children map out a sense of future with their hopes/plans and aspirations does indeed build resilience and instils hope to take the next steps forward.

The latest mental health and wellbeing research (Carpenter and Carpenter, 2020) suggests 5 themes to consider when pondering the potential impact of the Covid-19 response: routines, structure, friendships, opportunities and freedom. If we can consider the implications of these 5 core themes for our own children then we can begin to understand what support to offer them in order to allow them to recover from this event and reconnect with school/social life meaningfully.



How can parents and carers prepare their children for a return to school?

- Children will observe, and follow their parents/carers reactions; they look to you as their parents/carers for guidance on how to respond to events. If you react calmly then they are more likely to respond this way. Children will frequently mirror their parents and carers responses to situations so it's important to make sure you are looking after yourself, that you show children that you are confident and able to support them. An online therapeutic grab-pack is available discussing how to support your own mental health and wellbeing which is free for all parents (gov.je).
- Acknowledging and validating your child's worries and concerns about returning to school and providing time for your child to talk to you about this, will help your child to feel heard and understood. Validation is a process of valuing someone's feelings by showing them that you understand that what they feel is real to them, without passing judgement or offering opinions.
- Start initiating regular conversations with your family about how everyone is feeling. These don't have to always be deep and meaningful but it's useful to get everyone feeling safe about discussing emotions so you might want to start the conversation when you're having a kick about with a football in the garden, checking in with your child/ren about how their day has been, etcetera.
- Consider your structures and routines at home and make sure you have regular family time e.g. eating dinner altogether and chatting without the TV on.
- Establish and maintain a routine, including bedtime and getting up time, similar to the school routine to help children gently adjust as they return. Good sleep patterns are fundamental to wellbeing and routines provide a sense of control and predictability for children which creates a stable environment. Resources on managing sleep are also available in a Sleep Matters 'Grab Pack' if you need support in this area.
- Consider your family lifestyle and how balanced it is e.g. healthy eating, sleeping well, exercise etcetera. Having this balance most of the time can increase your own and your children's resilience and a positive attitude that instils an internal sense of control. The aim is to achieve a state where each of you feels you have the power to direct and change what happens in your life and recognize that you are not helpless in all matters.



- As our children return to school and settle, there will be lots of familiar faces and lots of things will feel reassuringly familiar to them. But to keep children and staff safe, the school will operate in a slightly different way to the way your child remembers it to be. Children will move around in 'bubbles' of no more than 15 pupils for example. Changes will continue to occur as Jersey adjusts to new information, advice and experiences. Have open and honest discussions about expecting changes to continue to occur so that children can anticipate these and feel more in control when they happen .



- There may be some unanswered questions in your child's mind; to help them feel more confident about the things that are too far in the future to see or control, help them to think about their own wellbeing as the highest priority piece in an emerging jigsaw that we will complete together .



- Focus on the aspects within their control with the current information received from school about plans/timetables. Discuss plans/ timetables with your child about expectations and focus on the short-term (next few weeks) to avoid children worrying about times too far ahead. Sharing a school timetable regularly, prior to your child going to school every morning will help them feel more in control of what to expect, with time to talk through worries/ concerns with you.
- Providing opportunity for clarifying unclear information with school. Timetables are likely to adapt with the evolving situation, however, having a routine will help children to be prepared for what to expect, this can reduce worries/anxieties. Make this visual if you can and display it somewhere prominent or allow them to take it to school. Include the basics/ obvious facts too e.g. what will you be doing/ where will you be when they are at school? Who is doing the drop off and pick up? Who will be at home when school is finished?

Further reading

Online therapeutic grab packs for adults, children and young people are available at gov.je. These include:

- 'The Window of Tolerance' - a model to help support parents/carers and their children through the early weeks of returning to school;
- The Directory of Mental Health and Wellbeing - outlining the range of services available across Jersey, including Voluntary agencies, and;
- How to access the Children and Families Hub – includes a multi professional Hub able to help you navigate which of our teams is best placed to offer you the support you need, giving you the right help at the right time.

<https://www.gov.je/health/coronavirus/educationchildcare/pages/psychologywellbeingservicecoronavirusresponse.aspx>

In school resources

ELSAs

Jersey has over 100 trained ELSAs (Emotional Literacy Support Assistants) employed across schools. ELSAs have all undergone extensive training by Educational Psychologists and Wellbeing Facilitators and continue to attend regular clinical supervision and professional development. Talk to a member of staff at school for more information, or contact the consultation line for the Wellbeing Team (details online and Gov.je).

Additional Useful Resources might include

<https://www.evidenceforlearning.net/recoverycurriculum/>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-your-child-is-anxious-about-going-back-to-school/>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/resources/schoolresources/academic-resilience-resources/> <https://www.boingboing.org.uk/>

<https://www.annafreud.org/coronavirussupport/>

Social Story - returning to school



<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Coronavirus-back-to-school.pdf>

<https://www.kidshealth.org.nz/sites/kidshealth/files/pdfs/When%20the%20world%20went%20back%20L2%5B1%5D.pdf>