

# Supporting your Child Return to School



Change can be challenging and the return to school may be daunting for some students. Here are some tips and suggestions for parents.

Listen and talk:



- Allowing your child to talk about the return to school and what may be worrying them can help ease their anxiety. Listening calmly and acknowledging your child's feelings will help them feel more secure. You can validate feelings by saying, "I can see how you might feel worried... ."
- Avoid dismissing fears (e.g., "there's nothing to be worried about. You'll be fine!") or asking questions that suggest you expect kids to be anxious (e.g., "are you worried about going back to school?"). Instead, try demonstrating confidence that your child can handle the situation. Increase their confidence by encouraging them think about ways they have or can handle the things they are worried about.
- Optimistic talk about the return to school - e.g., school as a fun, positive opportunity - can help children to think about the benefits. Try setting time aside each day to talk about challenges or new experiences at school. Talk through any issues - friends, catching up on schoolwork, staying motivated, time management, etc. Normalise it might take some time to readjust. Try finding out about your child's understanding about the return to school and correct any misunderstanding.

Planning and Routines:



- For anxious kids, plenty of detail, preparation and routines can be calming. Involve your child in Plan-Making. Good bed-time routines are crucial. Keep to routines as much as possible. Plan a family celebration to mark their first day/week back or milestones.
- Develop a morning ritual - Invent a fun routine for saying goodbye at drop off - try a high-five, bear hug or secret handshake and establish a specific pick up or 'see you later area.'
- Get your child involved in planning or packing their lunches and snacks. For younger children, help them pack their bag the night before. You can lay out or have children prepare their uniform. Allow some extra time to get ready on the first days back so you can remain calm and not rush.
- Talk through the steps of getting to school or class: "First we'll have breakfast, then... we'll say our morning Quran/ Dua for protection together.... then you wait in the assembly area, say Salams to your friends and play with them until the bell..."
- Creating visual reminders, checklists or 'To Do Lists' or gradual 'Independence Charts' can help your child remember plans and routines or what they may need to do or take with them. Setting reminders and alarms on devices can help audio-visual learners. Token economy systems or reward charts can help motivate and reinforce positive behaviour.
- Some children may want to child to bring a security item from home to help them cope (e.g., a drawing, note from a parent, photo or comfort object). This can remain in the child's pocket or bag during the day.

## Morning Drop offs:

- Talking positively about the day ahead on the way to school can help.
- Remind your child where you will be at pick-up time.
- Remind your child you will be back and say, “Great job staying calm and coming to school today. When I pick you up, I look forward to hearing about something fun you did.”
- Give your child some final positive reassurance and leave promptly. Drawn-out goodbyes can be upsetting, including for other kids nearby.
- Instead of saying “bye,” try “see you soon/ later, inshaAllah!” to help signal that the separation is temporary.
- Try some positive actions at home or on the way to school like reciting Quran and Dua for protection or practising your funny ‘see-you-later’ phrase or handshake. Give positive attention, specific praise and selective rewards for positive coping and brave behaviours at drop off and for successful separations.
- If you think your child will be reluctant to separate at drop off, talk to the school (we can try to organise for a buddy or staff to meet with and engage your child on arrival).

## Exposure and repetition help ease anxiety:

- For some children, even getting out of the house after such a long stay at home may be anxiety provoking. Try gradual practice situations, starting with some easy tasks first. You can practice by going out for walks, visits or running errands. You can do drive by the school a few times before your child’s first day back, (you can even drive to the school and practice getting out of the car) or practice getting dressed in school uniform. Role-play making new friends and what they can do to maintain connections. Role-play morning drop-offs and morning routines.
- Going to school, even when anxious, can help build your child’s distress tolerance – the more we avoid situations that make us anxious, the more we reinforce in our brains that those situations are indeed dangerous or scary.

## Stay calm and check your emotions:

Try to model and practice relaxation and coping strategies with your child. Reassure yourself and your child that it is normal for children to feel some anxiety. They will adjust, it just takes time. Try to stay calm and firm, positively reinforce and be consistent.

## Utilise resources and help:

The school is there to help. If your child shows signs of anxiety and has difficulties, you can let your teacher know or get in touch with Wellbeing or a School Counsellor. External telehealth mental health professionals may also be helpful. The evidence based, free, online interactive parent, child and adolescent BRAVE Program helps to prevent and treat anxiety. See <https://brave4you.psy.uq.edu.au/>