



Holy Trinity Academy
& Sixth Form
Telford

Supporting your child's mental health as they return to school after the school closure

BACK TO SCHOOL



The Coronavirus

The coronavirus outbreak has caused major disruptions to daily life and young people are feeling these changes deeply. Whilst the return to school will be not only be exciting for many students, others will be feeling anxious or have the 'fear of the unknown' at what 'the new normal' will be like at school.

Starting school or starting a new school year can be a time of worry for young people at the best of times, let alone after a different way of life for the last 6 months.

Returning to school will come with some mixed emotions for many. There are certainly those that can't wait to see their friends, get back to their sports and resume pre-covid activities both at school and at home.

Then there are those that have become very used to the security and relative comfort of the family home, loving the slower pace, the limited car trips to activities, the weekends free of commitments and the hours of family bonding.

There are those kids that have enjoyed working at their own pace, free from the need to be 'socially switched on' all the time and the emotional energy that a normal school day can consume.

And then there are those oscillating between all of the above.

On one hand being able to see the value of their time spent in isolation, whilst also craving a return to whatever our new normal looks like.

Whatever your child's situation and however they are feeling, this time of change and transition may require some adjustments to mind set and expectations both for yourselves as parents, and for your children too, as they head back after such a lengthy break.

It is important you as parents can support your child at whichever phase they are at.



Normal emotions and responses

The stress and grief response is perfectly normal

Normalize Anxiety

Anxiety can be healthy

- But not all adolescents, or adults, know that it typically acts as a useful and protective emotion. Accordingly, teenagers sometimes fear that their heightened nerves signal the onset of anxiety disorder which in my instances isn't the case. They become worried about the fact that they are worried and we need to find a way to support them.
- Parents can help young people appreciate that healthy anxiety has a purpose: It alerts us to potential threats and helps us move toward safety. Feeling worried or anxious makes sense right now, there has been lots of changes and worries around the virus. You're having the right reaction to the coronavirus outbreak and having to return to school after such a long time away."

Loss and Bereavement:

Loss comes in many shapes and sizes, and during the recent pandemic we have all faced a multitude of losses. Tragically some young people will have experienced significant loss (loss of life of a loved one).

All young people will have experienced many other types of loss, just as we have as adults.

General points to consider when supporting your child:

- Don't feel you have to take painful feelings away or fix things, just listen and try to work out how to support them.
- Grief is a natural response but its good to let your child know that it can display and look very different to each of us
- Encourage routines at home
- Encourage your child to express their feelings- scrap book, memory box or drawing/ painting
- Ask for support from the school pastoral team if needed



Ways to support your child ready to return to school in September after the COVID-19 school closure

Practically:

- Encourage your child to get their bag ready early, making sure they have everything they need. This will stop the worry on the first morning back
- Try and get your child back to morning routines and sleeping patterns before day 1 so they can get the mind and body ready to go
- Communicate with your child that there will be some rules, routines and procedures they are used to but there will also be some new ones at school, but the teachers will be helping them with these and ensuring everyone is aware of any changes. This is to keep everyone safe.

Supporting your anxious child:

For those students that have been enjoying the security of learning from home, the thought of returning to school after such a long time can be a very daunting.

Things parents can do to help.....

- **Listen and validate:** sometimes just acknowledging their concerns is enough. You can validate their feelings without feeling you have to give them all the answers.
- Remember, parents set the emotional tone of the household. Talk in a positive way about the teachers and the school, and show your child you have faith in how things will play out. It doesn't mean we have to constantly tell them everything will be perfect and wonderful, but we can be conscious of how we talk about it and try to maintain positive.
- Help them try and flip their concerns.

For example, encourage them to move from "What if I go to school and nobody wants to talk to me" to "What if you go to school and people are happy to see you". Let's look at other ways we can talk to ourselves. Asking other questions such "How have I dealt with this before" can help reframe their concerns.

Remember a little anxiety is normal and to be expected.



Weaning from the screens:

It is no surprise that screen time for young people has jumped significantly during the times of home isolation. Aside from earning from home, which is done primarily via a device of some sort, the technology also took over many other elements of young people's lives. Some of the everyday experiences that were taken away were replaced by their use of screens. Social connections are crucial for young people and the screens were able to fill that void. Strict boundaries around screen time may well have gone out the window as parents also struggled to manage our own work whilst still keeping young people occupied and this is perfectly normal for the situation.

Be confident that they will more than likely be so excited to go back to seeing friends and hanging with people in real life, that the screens will naturally begin to wean. This may have already started to happen over the summer break.

- Weaning of the screens may mean making gradual reductions in times with the technology so our kids can get used to re introducing many of the other elements into their day.

Reflecting back and looking forward:

Use this time to have conversations with your child that allow you all to reflect on the experience of being in isolation/lockdown and what that can mean for you all looking forward. Some conversation starters...

- What are some of the habits or routines you picked up that would be good to keep?
- What were some of the things you enjoyed about this time?
- What sorts of things was the technology able to replace? What voids was it able to fill?
- What were the things technology was not able to replace?

Sleep routine:

- It is important that the weeks leading up to starting school again, your child starts to find a sleep pattern that will suit their school day routine.



Managing unexpected endings and transitions

September and the first day of Secondary School can be daunting enough for a new Year 7 student.

This year will bring a mix of emotions for new students.

Without their usual end to primary school, without celebration and welcoming in the new beginnings of Secondary school with their transition days. It is now the 'fear of the unknown' for most.

Managing the transition for young people to return to school will be key to maintain their

It is important to:

- Normalise any worries your child has, most new students will be feeling the same way your child is feeling and this can bring some comfort to them knowing they aren't the only one feeling that way.
- Allow your child to use appropriate social support networks, this may be socially distanced meet ups or using age appropriate social media in a safe way to speak with friends from school.
- Focus on accomplishments rather than losses. Many primary schools have tried to find ways to celebrate Year 6 students achievements and end of primary school in many different ways this year. It has not been the same end as usual and may still not be the closure your child hoped for.
You could celebrate at home, use a memories book or find a way to write down all the things they enjoyed about primary school.
- You could also look at all the things they are looking forward to when they get to Holy Trinity Academy. This will allow them to talk about any worries so they feel more settled on their first day



Sources of Help & Support

Web address: childrenssociety.org.uk

What is BEAM?

'Be kind to your mind'

They are an emotional health and well-being drop in service for young people.

Where is BEAM?

9 Market Square

Wellington

TF1 1BP

Mondays and Tuesdays- 12pm-7pm

Saturdays- 11am-4pm



BEAM is currently running a telephone service. Please follow the link for more details.

<https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/beam/shropshire>



Web address: www.kooth.com/

What is Kooth?

Kooth is for online mental well-being support. You can chat with the team using the app or on the computer. You can also use the app to keep a daily journal or check out the magazine articles.



Web address:

www.childline.org.uk

Helpline: **0800 1111**

Who are Childline?

Childline are there to listen to you, whatever is on your mind and to help support and guide you with making choices if you are



School:

You can speak with your child's pastoral support officer and they will be able to give you some guidance.

YoungMinds– Parents supporting their child after the COVID-19 lockdown:

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/supporting-your-child-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/#supporting-your-child-as-they-return-to-school>

YOUNGMINDS