

Returning to school: 7 tips for parents/carers to help young people cope (Secondary)

Adapted from: Parent zone

After months of remote learning and a range of COVID-19 restrictions, young people will be returning to school routines, classrooms, classmates, teachers, expectations and, in some cases, even new school settings.

Amid the anticipation and excitement many young people are feeling, for some, leaving the home learning routine and environment may create anxiety for a range of reasons including: the ongoing uncertainty of COVID-19; social distancing and hygiene measures in place; family circumstances related to health; grief associated with a recent loss; or economic circumstances. To prepare and support students' return to onsite learning and the classroom/school environment, consider the following tips:

1. Talk to your child about how they feel

- It is important to encourage young people to discuss their feelings about returning to school.
- If they feel anxious or worried, help them understand this is perfectly normal, and that you and their teachers and support staff are there to support them.
- Although difficult, try not to share any anxiety you may be feeling with your child.
- Bear in mind that your child may be returning to a pre-existing issue from before remote learning – for example, a relationship issue, or difficulty with school work or staff. Or they may just feel apprehensive about returning to the school social environment.
 - Try to give them a non-judgemental and supportive place to share any worries. Some young people may not always have the words to express their feelings, so try to find a way of bringing up the conversation without putting pressure on them – for instance when you're going for a walk or in the car. This can help them to open up naturally and identify what they're concerned about.

2. Pack right, pack light

- Make sure your young person has a mask that will be comfortable for them to wear all day. Being at home may have meant that wearing a mask all day will be unfamiliar. Support them to have a spare mask in their bag in case it breaks.
- Only bring the equipment that they will need for the first day, but make sure that their device is charged. Student confidence is improved if they have the right tools and if they are appropriately attired in their uniform to be comfortable.
- Ensure that arrangements are in place for a nutritious lunch and snacks. Make sure your student has a clearly named drink bottle.

3. Support young people to understand the school procedures

- Go through the Return to school communication with your student/s, so that they are clear on expectations and procedures as they return.
 - If you haven't received this information or are unsure you should contact the College office.
- It will be important for your child to understand social distancing, the wearing of face masks and hygiene rules and, importantly, why they are in place.

- Read school communications with your child and make sure they are prepared and know what to expect when they arrive at school.

4. Familiarise yourself with school procedures

- If you transport your child to/from school, you'll need to know where and when to drop them off and pick them up, as well as what parts of the school you can access. Parents/Carers must continue to observe the directions of Victoria's Chief Health Officer (ie. social distancing).
- If your child travels to/from school independently, including on public transport or country buses, you should talk to your young person about getting to and from school, including observing the directions of Victoria's Chief Health Officer (ie social distancing, group gatherings, face masks).
- If you are collecting your young person at the end of the day, plan for where your collection will take place, so everyone is in the right place at the right time.
- If they travel home independently, depending on their age, make sure someone is home to meet them or if that isn't possible, that you call them to check-in when they arrive home.

5. End of day emotions

- A school day can require a lot of self-regulation or compressed behaviour, which can lead to tired and emotional outbursts later on in the day.
- Given the length of remote learning and new school safety procedures in place, these emotions may be hard to cope with when they return home.
- It is a good idea to keep this in mind, and allow for some 'letting off steam' allowing young people to unwind – encourage an outdoor walk or other physical activity.

6. Stay informed

- Given the long absence from school, there may be a period of readjustment. Studying and following rules are habits that will need to be relearnt.
- Discuss and affirm familiar routines and school expectations regarding uniform, grooming, attendance and participation to help your young person reconnect with our school community.
- There may be fresh challenges for your young person, from working with new classmates and teachers, to coping with their work and school expectations.
- Try to stay informed about how they are getting on – but if you are concerned, contact your TA or House Leader.

7. Sleep and rest

- Young people may have been getting used to some unusual hours during the remote learning period and that may have extended into the school holidays.
- Make sure your child is getting a good night's sleep for their return to school.
- It might mean introducing some earlier bedtimes than they have had recently and limiting screen time.
- A good night's rest will help them cope with the return to school and the new routines they will be adapting to