

Feature

Tips to prepare your child for going back to school

THE number of children returning to the classroom is steadily increasing as schools across the UK start to invite more pupils back.

While some children are excited to return, there are many children who are feeling anxious about going back.

Some young people have been worried about separating from their family, while others have been concerned they will be behind with school work.

Many are also socially anxious and feel they will not know what to talk about and may end up being on their own while at school.

When trying to figure out how anxious your child is about going back to their classroom, look for signs of irritability when you mention school.

Also, if your child is avoiding school work, not contacting their friends or experiencing physical symptoms of anxiety such as their heart racing or feeling sick whenever you talk about school, these can all be signs that they are worried.

Think about trying some of the following: pass their school on your daily walk; drive them past school whenever you can; contact the school and ask for face-to-face contact with a teacher via an online video; ask the school if you can take your child in to walk around, pick up a text book or wave at a teacher



**Dr Hayley
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from a distance.

If these little bits of exposure cause your child to become anxious, it's likely that there's going to be higher levels on their first day back.

When your child isn't exposed to something that they are anxious about or if they avoid a situation that causes them to worry, their anxiety can grow and become a lot worse when they are exposed to it once again.

When trying to help a child manage their back to school anxiety, firstly, explain to them that any worry they have is important.

No worries are silly.

Let them know that you want to

be able to try and help, and that you wouldn't do anything that they didn't want you to do.

Keep exposure going in relation to school and their social contacts.

Go past their school on your daily walk, set up socially distanced meet ups with a friend or organise a trip to the school playground.

These small and controlled exposures give the young people evidence that they can cope, that they do have friends and they can manage school situations without panicking.

The more evidence you can help them build to challenge their fears, the better.

However this exposure needs to be done in small steps.

Your views

Write to: Letters, Oxford Mail, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0EJ or email letters@oxfordmail.co.uk

If it is taken too fast, the young person might panic and this can lead to a setback.

Also, create space for talking with activities like baking and walking the dog together, so that your child has numerous opportunities to tell you about their worries.

During conversations, do try to mention school to your child.

Discuss memories you have of their teacher or teachers and stories you have of them and their friends.

This will ignite nice memories and help your child to get enthusiastic about going back.

Many people's anxieties are related to the unknown.

So, I would also ask your child if there's anything that they would really like to know about returning

to school.

They might say 'I want to know what the classrooms will look like' or 'I'd really like to know what we will be doing on the first day back'.

You can then help to reduce their unknowns by finding out some of these things by emailing the school.

Also, remember, anxiety is really treatable.

Many young people experience high levels of anxiety, which cause them to struggle to get into school or stay in contact with their friends, but it's possible for them to overcome this.

So please do access support via your GP, the school or via a specialist service if it is needed.



All pupils in England are due to return to school in September.

Picture: iStock