

Information for parents from the Educational Psychology Service
Returning to School: Well-Being Document (June 2020)

Please read the 'What happens when I go back to school?' document on the school website.

Mental Health needs

83% of CYP (children and young people) reported their mental health difficulty had worsened during lockdown (Young Minds Survey). For example, children may have developed anxiety as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. An estimated 15% of parents/carers report that their child would be too afraid to leave the house (Waite et al, 2020).

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

COVID-19 appears to have had a big impact on those already suffering with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) in terms of their focus on hygiene and handwashing rituals. The return to school may well heighten students' concerns about becoming ill or infecting others. Children and young people displaying OCD behaviours will need understanding and additional support.

The following resources may help CYP with OCD:

- 'Obsessive Compulsive disorder: A Young Person's Self-Help Guide' by Coventry & Warwickshire NHS Partnership Trust

- 'What to do when your brain gets stuck: a kid's guide to overcoming OCD' by Dawn Huebner

- Advice from Young Minds for young people experiencing OCD in the pandemic.

- OCD UK Specific tips about dealing with Coronavirus can be found at <https://www.ocduk.org/ocd-coronavirus-summary/> and <https://www.ocduk.org/ocd-and-coronavirus-survival-tips/>

Anxiety

Some children with pre-existing anxiety issues may feel particularly worried about returning to school. An Anxiety Toolkit is available in the Healthy Young Mind in Herts website. The following strategies may also help:

- Discuss with the young person any specific worries they may have. For example, they may have worries around getting on with friends, falling behind with their work, being in a noisy classroom.

- Ask the young person what they think will help.

- Develop robust transition plans between schools, phases and classes so that the young person is prepared for change.

- Where necessary, modify the environment or make other adaptations to reduce sensory overload, e.g. allow the child to wear headphones; provide a safe space for the child if they feel overwhelmed; and provide supported activities for times of the day that provide particular challenges such as a Lego club during break time.

- Provide structured opportunities for the young person to develop their relationships with adults and peers so they build their support networks and develop their sense of belonging
- If the young person is beginning to school refuse, consider adapting some of the usual routines that trigger negative emotions to make it easier for the child enter the school building. For example: consider a later start time or using a different entrance; have a "meet and greet" with a set routine; encourage a peer to accompany them to school to distract them from negative thoughts on the journey; introduce a visual timetable so they know what is going to happen throughout the day and point out any unexpected changes in advance
- Explicitly teach young people strategies on how to manage their emotions.
- Explicitly teach young people how to solve problems and help them feel better able to cope
- Books that may help support children and young people with anxiety:
 - "What to do when you worry too much: a kid's guide to overcoming anxiety" by Huebner & Matthews (for primary-age children)
 - "My anxiety handbook: Getting back on track" by Gallagher, McEwen & Knowles (for secondary-age children)
 - "Helping your child with fears and worries: 2nd edition: a self-help guide for parents" by Cathy Creswell (for parents)
 - "Overcoming your child's shyness and social anxiety" by Willets & Creswell (for parents)

Separation anxiety

It is likely that after being at home for a number of months, some children will feel more worried than usual about separating from their parents/carers. Separation anxiety is a normal stage of development for babies and toddlers but most children outgrow it by around 3 years old. However, some older children continue to be anxious about leaving their parents /carers. Children may worry that they or their parents will not be safe or be able to cope if they are separated from each other.

More information about separation anxiety can be found at:

<https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/get-help/anxiety-information/young-people-and-anxiety/separation-anxiety/>.

The following can help children with separation anxiety:

- Having a transitional object. "A transitional object is something that can be used to remind the child that even though they are separated from their parent, they can continue to hold them in mind and feel their connection with them". Examples of transitional objects include: a pebble; photo of the parent; a kiss drawn on a hand; perfume sprayed on the child's shirt; a note in the child's lunchbox...
- An organised "Meet and greet" from a key person at the start of the day that follows a regular routine. Having a key person can help the child cope because they serve as a substitute attachment figure in school.
- When dropping the child off, the parent should:
 1. Pass the child to a trusted adult
 2. Have a clear routine for saying goodbye to their child (e.g. a kiss on the head and a clear goodbye) so the child knows exactly what is going to happen

3. Reassure the child that they will see them later and give the message they believe the child will cope
4. Be kind but firm, and do not give in if the child becomes upset
5. Leave quickly without drawing out the goodbyes or "sneaking away".

- A "soft start" to the day where the child does a fun activity with the key person prior to going into class. Alternatively, consider a "busy bag" for child to do when they first come into the classroom to distract them from their worries.

Useful books to read with a child with separation anxiety include:

- The Kissing Hand
- The Invisible string
- Owl Babies
- The Kiss Box
- The Huge Bag of Worries

- A visual timetable so the child knows what will happen and when they will see the parent again.

Selective Mutism

SMIRA has produced some information regarding selective mutism and coronavirus, here:

<http://www.selectivemutism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Covid-19-Advice-to-Parents-and-Carers.pdf>

Teach emotional control

- Use one-to-one or small group sessions to explicitly teach children how to manage their feelings. These should include: helping children identify their emotions; labelling their emotions; identifying what triggers anxiety and other negative emotions; how thoughts, emotions and behaviours link together; strategies to calm themselves down and cheer themselves up.
- Resources to help schools teach emotional control include:
 - o Zones of Regulation. The EP service can provide training if required.
 - o "Starving the Anxiety Gremlin". There are different books for different age groups.
 - o "Think Good, Feel Good: A Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Workbook for Children and Young People" by Paul Stallard.
 - o CBT Toolkit for Children and Adolescents by Liz Phifer.
- Children with anxiety may need support to implement self-calming strategies during the school day. Adults working with these children should carefully monitor them for increasing levels of anxiety. When they notice the child beginning to become dysregulated, they could encourage the child to use strategies they have been taught.
- You may consider introducing a calm box. This is a small box with an assortment of card to choose from. Each card should describe an activity that can be used to sooth heightened anxiety. When adults notice the child is getting anxious, they should direct them towards the calm box and give them a choice of which activities they want to do. (For example, "You could breathe deeply or go outside and walk around for 2 minutes. Which one?"). An adult should do the soothing activity with the child. After a while, the child may begin to let the adult know when they need to use the calm box.

- Staff could ask anxious students to identify specific coping strategies to use in situations which typically trigger anxiety / overwhelming emotions - Identify the most common triggers of anxious and negative thoughts. For example, not being able to do the work. For each trigger, encourage the child to generate a list of coping strategies they could use in each situation to calm themselves down.

If I can't do the work...

-I can ask my TA or teacher for help. They'll be pleased I asked.

-I can look and see what other people are doing.

-I can look at the board or books to give me ideas about what to do.

It may be useful to role play some of these situations so the child feels confident they can implement the coping strategy in each situation.

The child may want to put their coping strategies on cards to carry round with them to refer to throughout the day.

Regularly review the triggers and coping strategies. During reviews talk about whether the child managed to use the strategy - what helped them use it? -was it difficult to use? -why? -would a different strategy be better?

Try to find out exactly what the child is worried about & what they think might happen as a result. E.g. "I'm worried the teacher is going to ask me a question and getting it wrong."

"Then people will think I'm stupid." Test out the worry - help the child to consider other points of view for example, ask how many times people can things wrong and how many times people have been seen as stupid. Is their evidence to support their fears?

-Give children lots of praise for having a go at facing their fears instead of avoiding them.

Information and Advice Helplines

Anxiety UK : 03444 775 774 Web:

www.anxietyuk.org.uk

Mental Health Foundation Web:

www.mentalhealth.org.uk

No Panic-Voluntary charity

offering support for sufferers of
panic attacks and OCD. : 0844 967

4848 Web: www.nopanic.org.uk

OCD Action-Support for people
with OCD. Includes information on
treatment and online resources. :

0845 390 6232 Web:

www.ocdaction.org.uk

NSPCC-dedicated to ending child abuse and child cruelty. : 0800 1111 for Childline for children (24-hour helpline) 0808 800 5000 for adults concerned about a child
Web: www.nspcc.org.uk

Beat-Eating disorder support :
0808 801 0677 (adults) or 0808 801 0711 (for under-18s) Web:
www.b-eat.co.uk

HPFT provide a CYP Eating Disorder service and has a Multi-Disciplinary Team providing countywide support:
<https://www.hpft.nhs.uk/services/community-services/community-eating-disorders-service/>

Mencap-working with people with a learning disability, their families and carers. : 0808 808 1111 Web:
www.mencap.org.uk

Managing self-harm webinar:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFZCCbdXPZs>