

Managing anxiety when returning to school

Children may experience some worries and difficulties about returning to school after such a long period of being at home with their loved ones.

The following tips may help parents/carers transition children back to the school environment.

Practice Separation	Your children may be used to being with or around you constantly. Therefore practice time away from them gradually. If possible, leave them for short periods and for short distances with another caregiver. Then these times and distances can gradually increase.
Schedule separation times	Within the home environment have times where the child is not directly with a caregiver. As long as it is safe, allow the child time to be alone and manage this independently.
Create a quick 'Goodbye'	Develop a consistent pattern of behaviour or phrase that signals to the child that you are leaving. This could be a brief saying, quick kiss or high-five. This consistent and brief ritual creates predictability and over time this ritual can reassure the child that you will return.
Leave quickly and simply	Often children can get upset when a parent/caregiver leaves. Our instinct is to comfort them until they feel better. Unfortunately this comforting can reinforce the anxiety for the child. Don't stall or stay, quickly say goodbye, briefly reassure your child that you will return and go.
Use teacher/staff if needed	If your child is highly distressed when you leave you can discuss this with your teacher and a consistent drop-off routine can be developed. Normally, children's level of distress drops quickly and they are able to engage with peers and teachers quickly after the parent/carer leaves.
Deliver on promises	If your child finds it hard to separate and you make a promise to them, ensure you keep this promise. Being consistent and predictable helps build trust for your child and will make it easier for them to believe that you will return.
Try not to give in	When your child is highly distressed and refusing to go to school we may allow them to stay home as this reduces their anxiety initially. However, this reinforces the anxiety and makes it bigger so that next time it is even harder to get back to school.
Normalise worry	Try to not get upset or angry with yourself when your child is anxious. Instead, explain that feeling worried is a normal emotion that we all feel at times and that together we can help them manage these uncomfortable feelings.

If your child is having significant difficulty returning to school please talk to your teacher. It is hard for parents/carers to encourage their child to go to school when you can see your child in distress. Teachers are often a trusted and consistent support for children in the school environment and can help children and parents with difficult transitions.