

# Return to School in a Changing World

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For many families, going back to school this year may not be 'business as usual'. There will likely be additional stressors as most children, teens, and young adults have not been in a physical learning environment for many months. Here are some helpful tips to support a smooth transition back to school.

## Understand school guidelines

- **Be aware** of any classroom guidelines for the upcoming school year
- **Practice any skills** your child may need depending on their exposure to a classroom with such guidelines (e.g., wearing masks, keeping a safe distance, etc.)

## Prepare emotionally

- **Discuss their anticipation** about the upcoming school year (e.g., what they are excited about, how they feel about returning, etc.)
- **If your child is nervous or worried**, validate their concerns and come up with a plan on how to best support them
- **Model calm and confident behaviors** to help reassure your child about being back in the classroom
- **Focus on teaching coping skills** to help manage any worry or concern about school. This may include techniques prior to school starting (e.g., implementing "calm" time throughout the day, journaling, deep breathing techniques, etc.)

- **Know the school professionals to contact** if needed (teacher, counselor, school psychologist, etc.)
- **If possible, contact school for a plan** regarding your child's overall well-being (e.g., allowing for a phone call in the middle of the day, gradual in-person exposure, having a "buddy" in the classroom, etc.)
- **Allow for debriefing at home** with ongoing problem-solving if necessary
- **Continue to observe their behaviors.** Note any lack of motivation, irritability, difficulty sleeping or lack of enjoyment for everyday activities. Consider speaking with the school or outside professionals if needed

## Prepare socially and academically

- **If possible, plan for social activities** with peers prior to school reopening. Consider starting with small group gatherings
- **Attend summer camps or extracurricular activities** with other peers in the neighborhood for social exposure

- **If you have a young child who has not spent much time in a classroom**, prepare them as best as possible by taking a tour of the school, playing on the playground at school, showing pictures of teachers, etc.
  - **Consider role playing** any necessary skills for the classroom (e.g., sharing with peers, waiting in line, hanging up backpacks, etc.)
- **If you have a child who is prone to challenges with separation** from parents, consider practicing gradual separation prior to school starting (e.g., start with the parent “not available” for short intervals of time or play dates for short periods of time) and have a detailed plan for drop-offs
- **If your child has an Individualized Education Program (IEP)**, consider requesting an IEP meeting as soon as the school year begins to discuss concerns and solidify accommodations

## Get organized

- **Gradually get back to a morning and bedtime routine** similar to schedules during the school year
- **Use checklists, visual schedules, calendars**, and any form of organization to clearly communicate expectations and responsibilities
- **Help your child** in getting themselves prepared and organized for school (e.g., subject coordinated school supplies, using a planner, organizing what they need the night before, etc.)
- **Plan for extra time** in the morning during the first week. Even with preparation, things may not run as smoothly
- **Allow for choices** to decrease potential power struggles and increase autonomy (e.g., choosing outfits, what to eat for breakfast, etc.)

## Additional Resources

- [Understood.org](https://www.understood.org)
- [Practical Ways to Help Kids Cope with Stress, Anxiety, and Anger](#)

### **Schedule a free consultation**

with a Rethink Board Certified Behavior Analyst by clicking [here](#).

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