

Transitioning back to nursery / school

As we begin to think about the end of lockdown it makes complete sense that your mind may turn towards your child returning to nursery or school.

Like all changes, there is a chance that you may feel uncertain, conflicted or worried about what may happen. It is important to understand that this is normal and that you are not alone in feeling like this.

This information sheet highlights some common experiences or thoughts about going back into nursery or school and ways to help support not only you, but your child too.

As a parent of a child experiencing a chronic health condition you may have been asked to shield for the past few months. It may be worth reflecting and considering some of the challenges and changes brought about during lockdown:

- We have had less social contact and been out of the house far less.
- We have had the same company and been dependent upon that company for several months.
- Getting used to speaking via telephone or video as opposed to face to face
- Getting used to saying “no, we can't do that”

During the easing of lockdown, the information that we received to keep us safe during the pandemic doesn't apply in quite the same way. It is important to notice how difficult it is to change course so quickly.

It is important to consider that this information is not exhaustive and is intended to be a snapshot of some of the main concerns that could be expressed. If you remain concerned and want to talk about your concerns for sending children back to school then please feel free to contact your medical team or GP.

Safety: We would encourage you to talk to teachers about how they are managing transition back into nursery / school and to ensure that individual medical factors are considered in their plans. While you may not get immediate answers, it is worth raising this on the agenda to support you and your child later on.

Uncertainty: Something that we can all get stuck with is not moving forwards when we cannot 100% predict the outcome. Avoidance of uncertainty can be ok in the short-term, but in the medium to long-term this can prevent us from moving towards what is important. Absolute certainty is an almost unobtainable goal. It is therefore important to consider what do we gain / lose from trying to wait for things to become 100% certain if it may never happen? Make room for “not knowing” and consider how our actions impact on what is important to you and your child’s physical and emotional health.

Threat: We can all experience information as threatening, especially if we aren't sure where the information has come from or if we can trust it. The more we care about something, the more likely we can be to experience thoughts and worries about it. Worries are understandable, they are your minds way of trying to keep you and those important to you safe. COVID-19 has made a lot of fears feel real for all of us, and especially those of who us whose children experience chronic health conditions. It is important to consider that these thoughts, are just that, thoughts about the world - you can choose how you respond to them. This isn't to say that some thoughts about risk aren't correct, but that you can choose how you respond to your thoughts as opposed to your thoughts dictating to you how you SHOULD respond—you are free to choose your own behaviour in line with what is important to you.

How will I tell if it's COVID-19: If you become concerned about your child’s health or symptoms when they return to school please contact your GP or appointed medical team in the first instance. Manage symptoms, colds, viruses in the same way as you usually would. If you or your child develop symptoms of COVID-19 it is important not only to contact medical professionals, but also your child’s school. If someone in your household develops COVID-19 symptoms then the household must self-isolate for 14 days. If someone tests positive for COVID-19 then they will need to self-isolate for 7 days from the onset of symptoms. Further guidance can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

How do I reassure my child that they are safe: It can feel difficult reassuring your child that they are safe when you may not be sure yourself. Your child might wonder why they are allowed back at school and question if this means they are now safe. It is important to be honest with your child about COVID-19 being a real risk, just like any other cold, virus or bug that they might pick up. It can be helpful to reassure your child that very few children are getting sick and they are unlikely to catch it. Try and use simple, age-appropriate language and welcome their questions. Focus on explaining the measures school/nursery are taking to keep them safe and the measures they can take to protect themselves, e.g. hand washing, keeping distance.

How can I prepare my child: It is normal for your child to feel anxious about returning to school after a prolonged period of lockdown. Encourage them to share their feelings, either through talking, drawing, or perhaps expressing their feeling using toys/play. Ask your child what they are looking forward to about returning to school/nursery, answer or help problem solve any worries they might have, and help to prepare them for what to expect when they return. Lockdown has led to a loss of normal routines and structure in children's lives, so it can also be helpful to consider preparing your child for the structure of school (and the early mornings!). Try re-introducing normal sleep routines and simple structure to your child's day so this does not feel too unfamiliar when they do return.

Moving back into “normal” life is not like flicking a switch, this can take time. Consider building up the confidence and familiarity slowly—introduce socially distanced activities for children with friends and exposure to the world outside of their usual 4 walls over time as opposed to having to do it all at once when nurseries and schools fully re-open.