



Back to School

Anxiety Management Guidelines

As your child gets ready to return to school, it is likely that they, and you, will feel anxious about this transition. The following strategies may be useful in reducing anxiety around returning to school.

Maintain a Routine/Structure: Children's routine has been affected by the outbreak in many ways. As you prepare for the return to school, it is best to keep structure in the day; this structure may reflect your child's school day to some extent. A typical routine may involve some exercise, play time, family time and regular meal times. Regular bedtime and morning-time routines will also be helpful. Keeping routines relatively consistent from day to day will support your child to predict what will happen each day and reduce the unsettled feeling associated with being out of the normal routine. Visual schedules may be useful to keep your child informed of the structure of each day.

Maintain a regular sleep routine: Changes to our sleep cycle can impact on our mood. If the uncertainty of the current situation is causing your child to lose sleep or disrupting his/her sleep routine, maintaining a regular bedtime and waking up time each day will be helpful. Begin to introduce a bedtime and waking up time which will be similar to what will happen upon return to school. This can be done in a gradual way so that your child does not experience a sudden change. For example, if your child has been staying in bed later over the last few months, begin to bring back the waking up time by ten minutes each day.

'Name it – Tame it': By accurately naming the emotion that a child is experiencing, he/she is supported to make sense of the emotion and to feel more in control of the feeling. Your child may be experiencing distress (fear, anger, sadness) with regard to returning to school. When experiencing anxiety/worrying thoughts, allow your child to feel heard and understood, to know that what he/she has to say is important and acknowledge that our



inability to change certain things can be frustrating. Naming your child's emotions as they naturally occur during the day will help him/her to identify what he/she is feeling and why he/she is feeling that way. For example, 'You are worried because we are getting your uniform ready for school'; 'I can see you are happy because you are smiling'. If your child is very upset, wait until he/she has become calm before discussing their feelings.

Model self-regulation for your child: Children learn from watching how adults respond to situations. Show your child how you respond to a frustrating task or a worrying situation. For example, you could say 'This is really hard to do and I'm feeling frustrated. I'm going to take a break and come back to it when I'm feeling calmer'. Show that you are breathing calmly and thinking about a situation before acting. While this is sometimes easier said than done, and we all get frustrated sometimes, try to remember that your child is learning from your response to difficult situations too.

Relaxation and Distraction Techniques: Using relaxation techniques can help to reduce stress. Distraction techniques can help us to forget worrying thoughts. Not every technique works for everybody, so it's best to try some out and see what may work best for your child.

Relaxation Techniques

- Deep Muscle Relaxation*
- Deep Breathing*
- Mindful Walking (*see below*)

**Step by step Deep Breathing and Muscle Relaxation exercises can be accessed here:*

https://www.stjosephsfoundation.ie/Portals/0/adam/FAQ%20with%20Categories/aQrQrylJ8k6oVVz3M7whyw/Link/Anxiety%20Management%20Guidelines%20and%20Resources_.pdf

Distraction Techniques

- Doing something your child enjoys
- Listening to music
- Drawing/colouring
- Watching TV
- Physical Exercise



Mindful Walking

- Mindful walking provides an active way to restore calm. During mindful walks, we can learn how to be more aware of our surroundings.
- During the walk, talk to your child about what he/she sees, smells, hears, feels and tastes. The Mindfulness 5-4-3-2-1 approach may be used; work with your child to identify the following:

Look around you. Identify + name:

- 5 things you **see**
- 4 things you **feel**
- 3 things you **hear**
- 2 things you **smell**
- 1 thing you **taste**

- This can be done in a fun and relaxed way, focusing on supporting your child to feel grounded and calm.