



OTTAWA-CARLETON
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD



HEALTHY PARENT, HEALTHY CHILD: TIPS FOR PARENTS TO SUPPORT THE RETURN TO SCHOOL

Returning back to school after a summer break is always an adjustment. This year, because of COVID-19, that transition can even be more challenging and, therefore, students need to be fully supported. Here are some tips for parents that might help as children return to school either in person or remotely.

First and foremost, remember that you are the most important person in your child's life. They will look to you for guidance so your thoughts and feelings about returning to school have a direct impact on your child. By maintaining a calm, confident, and reassuring manner, children will feel more at ease and better able to manage their own worries.

Reflect on your family needs.

While all families are experiencing stressors, take time to consider the unique needs of your family. Establish what is negotiable and non-negotiable. For example, attending school in-person may not be feasible under your family circumstances or alternatively, remote learning might not be an option. Be confident that your decisions are the best for your family at this time.

Acknowledge your emotions.

Returning back to school this year will be different than in other years. Set aside time to consider how you are feeling, and give yourself permission to feel that way. This is new to all of us; it isn't an easy time!

Model Calm.

As a parent, your child looks to you on how to feel. Being calm and not getting caught up in your child's anxiety will help your child to remain calm. Think and act with confidence regardless of the challenges. Focus on what is in your control. Believe in your child's ability — they are often stronger than you think!

Talk it out.

When talking to your child, lead positive conversations about school. Set aside time to talk about school and answer their questions. Focusing on what they can control will help limit the amount of time spent worrying about things they can't control.

- **Reviewing physical distancing rules and good hygiene practices.** These can help your child feel more at ease about their safety when in public spaces. Having your child practice wearing a mask, physical distancing and hand hygiene before school begins will normalize these routines at school. If your child is not used to wearing a mask, practicing this before school starts will be helpful.
- **Validate All Emotions.** Resist "fixing" your child's emotions by listening and acknowledging your child's feelings. Try responding with, "Tell me more...". Normalize their feelings. Explore their thoughts through questions such as: What are you excited about? What are you looking forward to? What worries do you have?



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Familiar Routines.

COVID-19 has disrupted our routines. Consider gradually moving back to your school year routine. This could include ensuring your child gets enough sleep with established bedtimes and mealtimes as well as getting ready for school.

Pay Attention to Special Transitions.

For those children experiencing other transitions this year, returning to school has special meaning and challenges. For example, children starting kindergarten are entitled to have a wonderful start to their school journey, even if it looks different than it would in other years. This includes all the usual traditions of gathering up supplies, and first day school photos (whether for in person or remote learning). Similarly, children starting high school, or moving to a new school, may be more nervous than usual because they missed the usual transition experiences. Reassure your child that there will be caring educators at school or virtually to support them to navigate their new experience.

Self Care:

- **Healthy Habits.** Developing good eating and sleeping habits as well as regular exercise can contribute to a healthy body and mind.
- **Reduce Stress.** Going back to school can be stressful for parents under normal circumstances. Try to take time for yourself. Even a little break can provide relief.
- **Reach out.** You are not alone: talk with members of your community, many of whom may be feeling the same way as you. Stay connected.

RESOURCES

From Worried to Well: Supporting Your Child at Home and at School (Webinar with Dr. David Tranter)

<https://www.bigmarker.com/nelson-professional-learning/From-Worried-to-Well-Supporting-Your-Child-at-Home-and-at-School?bmid=2ebb7615ab16>

School Mental Health Ontario:

<https://smho-smso.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Supporting-Mental-Health-and-Wellness-during-the-Return-to-School-Tip-Sheet-EN.pdf>

Healthy Parent:

<https://www.anxietycanada.com/articles/healthy-parent/>

Stressed Out Parents:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/parenting-purpose/201710/stressed-out-parent>



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