

## Returning to school – addressing common worries

Coming back to school from a long absence can be difficult especially when you aren't returning to a familiar environment but there are ways we can help pupils (or support them to help themselves).

The first thing is to recognise any fears, who can help them conquer these and what action they are going to take. Several of our Year 7 students have shared what things they are worried about when returning to school – some are listed below. Have a conversation with your son/daughter and together discuss which worries are theirs and identify who could help (this might be family members, online support, current Year 6 teachers etc).

Worries	Who could help	Action to be taken
I've fallen out with people over social media/texts		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider that many people will have fallen out with friends and/or family during the lockdown but we can move on from this.</li> <li>You could ask a parent/carer to speak to your new form teacher or Head of Year on your behalf before the start of term or speak to them yourself once you get to your new school.</li> <li>Maybe you could 'offer an olive branch' to the person you have fallen out with before the start of school. Reach out to other friends and arrange to speak to them on the first day back. Remain calm, offer an apology or forgiveness as there are probably bigger things to worry about in the world – get support from others to put this issue into perspective.</li> </ul>
I don't want to leave the house		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Before the day of your return, take short trips out – walk for 10 minutes, 20 minutes, then 30 minutes etc, take trips out in the car, then to the park, a garden centre, meet relatives at a 2m distance (whichever you are allowed to go to). You need to get used to the outside world again but take it slowly, you don't have to do it all at one time.</li> <li>Businesses and local authorities have done a lot to help keep you safe. Plan your route and research what they have done to reassure yourself.</li> </ul>
I don't want to leave my family		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remember families are bound together and these bounds come from the tiny things we can do for each other and our love and care for each other.</li> <li>Your family want you to have a fulfilling life which includes doing things without them plus you'll have more to talk about when you get back.</li> <li>We have to move forward in life to make us grow – think of the consequences of making a proactive positive decision, e.g. improving your prospects of getting a good job, independence, holidays, making friends etc.</li> </ul>
I need a haircut! (Or I've been given a horrific haircut)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I think you'll find a lot of us are in the same boat – we might not look our best and we need to be able to laugh about that rather than get insecure. Most people care more about what 'they' look like to bother thinking about what 'you' look like.</li> <li>You'll find that over the next 5 years you'll look very different to how you did when you first started with us. Looking back at how you've changed is an important part of the process.</li> </ul>
I don't like change		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A lot of people feel this way and change can be very overwhelming. Know that change happens, has to happen, will happen.</li> <li>While change is certain, how you respond to it is not fixed. You can adapt to it by controlling the small things – From September I will 'have' to go to school but I can control when I pack my bag, if I have a bath or a shower, which people I speak to, whether I will have a positive outlook, who I will help on the first day back etc.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Write yourself a list of events for the first day, e.g. – 1) get up at 7am 2) get washed and dressed, 3) eat breakfast etc then tick them off as you do them. Don't treat it as "Day One", think of it as a series of smaller events and tasks.</li> </ul>
I prefer home learning. Everything is too overwhelming at school		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some people will have hated home learning, but others will have loved it. Either way there will be things you have missed out on – practical experiments, team sports, performing, asking questions, making other people laugh, teachers' praise, choosing your own snacks at break time. So, make a list of the fine details that you have missed and focus on them. If you have specific sensory issues, please make these known (to a parent or teacher) so that we can help.</li> </ul>
I might get ill		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We reduce the risk of anybody getting unwell by following government guidelines on hygiene and social distancing – make sure you know what these are before returning to school, research the best strategies. There are specific times when you can wash your hands and there are hand sanitisers in classrooms etc.</li> <li>My Mind has useful information at <a href="https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/for-children-and-young-people/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/?utm_source=Schools+Updates&amp;utm_campaign=48637c1a62-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_04_25_03_46_COPY_01&amp;utm_medium=email&amp;utm_term=0_d23e44bb74-48637c1a62-74759935">https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/for-children-and-young-people/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/?utm_source=Schools+Updates&amp;utm_campaign=48637c1a62-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_04_25_03_46_COPY_01&amp;utm_medium=email&amp;utm_term=0_d23e44bb74-48637c1a62-74759935</a></li> </ul>
I've been feeling very down lately		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>These feelings can be overwhelming but luckily there are a lot of ways to cope with them. There are several resources listed below but talking to someone about your feelings (even if they don't have any 'answers') often is the best place to start. Don't run from your feelings – take control and tackle them head on. You will probably need support to do this so ask a parent to contact the school and/or one of the support services like CAMHS.</li> <li>The SENCO also has lots of resources, that might be able to help you, listed at the end of this document.</li> <li>Why not try a gratitude journal – it helps us focus on the positives.</li> </ul>
I think I'm behind on my learning		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You are certainly not alone on this one – some pupils will not have been able to work well at a computer for 5 hours a day, some will have been ill or too upset to work to their usual standard. Different primary schools will have set different amounts of work during lockdown.</li> <li>Teachers know this and will understand – we want to welcome you into school life and help you to get back up to speed.</li> <li>Putting a plan together, with your tutor or subject staff, will help to get you back on track. It is more important to focus on what you have achieved during lock down. Ask a parent/carer to approach them if you are a little shy.</li> </ul>
I've been ill and don't feel 100% I'm not used to all the walking anymore, I'm exhausted		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Making staff aware (or getting a parent/carer to) will help them to support you the best they can. Teachers will not expect you to catch up overnight – your Head of Year can help monitor the workload and inform staff if any adjustments need to be made. When you are back in school you won't have to walk about much as the rooms you will be using will be limited.</li> <li>Try to build up your stamina – start with some gently exercise (e.g. walk round the block) and then build up the time you're exercising for (e.g. 10 minutes, 20 minutes, then 30 minutes)</li> </ul>
My uniform doesn't fit		Most students will have grown over the time that they have been out of school and so their uniform may not fit; particularly if we go back to school on short notice, many parents will struggle to get new uniform for their children. If uniform is an issue, get a parent/carer to inform the school before the start of term.
Everyone's pretending everything is		Anxiety about what is happening in the world is to be expected – people are coping with it in different ways, whether or not they have been directly affected by it. Some use humour as a way to cope and don't mean any disrespect by it. Some people just want to be back in school, work hard, and forget about it for a while. Others will need some

normal – it's not normal!		support to come to terms with their feelings. All of these reactions are normal – if you need support please do reach out and ask.
I've lost a family member or friend There has been a family breakdown		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There will be few communities that will not have lost members to C-19, or other illnesses, during lockdown. It is essential that we recognise this and take time to mark and celebrate their lives. There are lots of sources of bereavement support available – please ask a parent/carer to contact school if you need this support.</li> <li>• The school can support parents/carers with information to take home. If a severe traumatic incident has occurred and you feel you need extra support, it is important that a parent/carer informs the school – we can offer lots of different support, e.g. one-to-one art therapy.</li> </ul>
I'm not used to getting up so early anymore and all the things I have to do		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For many pupils the re-establishment of routines will be difficult. This will not just be for school routines; it will also be for those basic daily life routines, such as sleep and getting up. We know that this is difficult and a source of anxiety at the beginning of every term, but this will be on a larger scale. We will need to re-learn the rhythm of the school – but we will be doing this together and we will find our new normal.</li> <li>• Getting into a sleep routine needs to be addressed weeks before you go back. The school can provide sleep hygiene resource to help you get into a good sleep routine.</li> <li>• Using visual aids may help you to establish good daily routines too – you can help create these!</li> </ul> <div data-bbox="411 1037 1481 1305" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <p><b>My morning routine</b></p> </div>
My parent/carer is a keyworker, these other students don't understand what it feels like		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There will be significant differences for those of you who have and have not been on a school site during the lock down.</li> <li>• It would be wrong to assume that those who have been in school are okay. There may be a feeling, for the students who have stayed in school, that school is their safe place and as others return to school, they are intruding on it – you need to be aware of other people's concerns.</li> <li>• Remember some students may not have been able to see a keyworker parent for several months and not had the opportunity of having a hug in all that time.</li> </ul>

## Services available to young people:

<https://www.kooth.com/> Free, safe and anonymous online support for young people

**MyMind** website also has a fantastic range of information on positive mental health and where to find support. <https://www.mymind.org.uk/>

Mental Health and Wellbeing = CAMHS have put together a set of resources which are designed for students and parents if they are experiencing stress, anxiety or other mental health challenges. These resources can be found here: <https://www.camhs-resources.co.uk/>



## **Bereavement support:**

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/> - Cruse offer support, advice and information to children, young people and adults when someone dies.

<https://www.winstonswish.org/> - **Winston's Wish** is the UK's childhood bereavement charity.

<https://www.griefcounter.org.uk/> **Grief Encounter** is a Child Bereavement Charity

## **Before you come back – building resilience**

There are many ways you can improve your own resilience – see the Head of Year for resources on the following areas - why not give them a try?

- Healthy Eating, Good Sleep Hygiene, Over-thinking, Perfectionism
- Anger management, Conflict resolution
- General resilience, Shyness
- Organisation, Being positive, Anxiety/Panic, Breathing Techniques, Mindfulness