

Parent/Guardian Information

Pastoral Advice - Start of Term

September 2020



This information is intended to provide parents/guardians with some suggestions for managing the emotional concerns pupils may experience in advance of the start of term.

Returning to school - managing anxiety in our children

Returning to school after the long summer break will usually generate a mixture of emotions for pupils, but this year the additional factors posed by the pandemic may mean as September draws closer that your child is feeling anxious. You may even have noticed recent changes in your child's behaviour and be wondering what these can be attributed to - the reality is that returning to school is going to be a big transition in their lives in which parents have an important role to play; what can be done in the next ten days will have an impact on the way pupils settle back into school and no doubt ease any anxiety both pupils and parents may be feeling at the.

In this newsletter, you will find some practical suggestions to help your child feel better prepared for the new term, which in turn deal with any associated anxiety. This is in no way an exhaustive list, more like a starting point - further useful information can be found from the websites given at the end of this document.

It's important that a sense of calm and positivity is created in advance of going back to school, with pupils being clear that life does include ups and downs, but without catastrophizing these. The values we have focused on in previous terms at DCPS have included resilience, honesty and courage and it may be useful to remind your child of these as they face the challenges of the coming weeks. Everyone can be a 'values champion' within their own set of circumstances.

What can we do to help our child/children?

Be prepared

Try to consider what your child might see as a source of worry in advance of their return. Might they find it difficult to be separated from you, a pet or any other family member when school starts again? Will leaving your home be an issue they are worrying about? Trying to anticipate such concerns will enable you to be better prepared in supporting them.

Listen

Finding a good time to check in with them and using the right open ended question can be difficult - we've all been dismissed at some point with the predictable answer of "Good" or "Fine." If you can, try to open up the conversation about returning to school with sufficient time available to explore any concerns they may have. Having the time to listen to them is so important - what they tell you may not seem a rational source of concern to you, but having time to listen to them will encourage them to feel their concern is accepted by you. Rather than dismissing them with "Don't worry," try saying something like "I know it's hard" and reassure them that they aren't alone in feeling this way.

Be supportive

As far as possible, try not to pass on your own stress to your child. These times are difficult for us all and every family has their own unique set of situations to manage. Your attitude can make a big difference, so try to remind them of the good things about going back to school - seeing friends and teachers again and carrying on with learning new things. Whilst we often think children aren't listening to us, in reality they don't miss a thing, so be aware of them taking their cue from you.

Keep routines consistent

Experts are calling lockdown's five months of late nights and lie-ins as "social jet-lag" and many children will suffer at the start of term if adjustments to routines are left too late. The Children's Sleep Charity recommends gradually bringing bedtimes forward and making wake-ups in line with your usual school routine so that pupils will feel naturally tired at the right times in the day in preparation for the start of term. Gaming and screen time may also need to be brought into balance - sudden adjustments will always be resisted, so begin to prepare the way for any changes needed early on. If it's been a while since you've done the school run with your child, consider doing this as part of your preparation, reminding them of the routine that is soon to resume.

Oiling their social skills

Many children may find they are worrying about friendships - 45% feel they have drifted away from their friends, according to a survey this month of 1,000 6 to 14 year olds. Anything you can do to encourage your child to make contact with their friends in advance of September will help them to exercise the social 'muscle'. Some children will have really enjoyed the isolation of lockdown and the holiday period that followed - returning to school may pose real worries for them that can be diluted by simply making contact with a small number of friends in the coming days.

Be realistic

It's important not to pretend that school will feel the same as pre-lockdown - your child's expectations need to be managed and their concerns shared. Everyone had the opportunity to return to school during the Trinity term but there will be differences as we return in September. Talk through the details that we send you in our regular communications, the routines and changes they can expect to experience. We will do our best to give all pupils the opportunity to speak about their concerns once the term begins in their regular tutor and from groups, but having conversations about the expected reality of the new school term will help ease any uncertainty. If you are aware of your child's anxiety levels rising, perhaps encourage them to write down their worries and put them in a 'worry box' or zip them inside the mouth of a 'worry monster'

(https://www.amazon.co.uk/Worry-Monster-Plush-Soft-orange/dp/B010NDN2IU/ref=sr_1_3?dchild=1&keywords=Worry+monster&qid=1598356361&sr=8-3) - this light-hearted way of dealing with worry can be just what's needed for some children.

'Out of sight and out of mind' can be an effective way to manage it.

In addition to reiterating the most important point of you always being there for your child, finding positive ways to reassure them that everyone at DCPS is also going to be there for them. From the very first moment they step foot on the school site again in September, there will be the familiar and expected range of staff available for your child - feeling confident in this in advance may help them in managing varying levels of anxiety they may be experiencing.

If you have any specific concerns or questions arising from this information sheet, please contact DCPS Head of Pastoral, Mrs L Hunt (alhunt@deanclose.org.uk)

Useful associated websites:

www.Youngminds.org.uk

www.Mentalhealth.org.uk

www.Careforthefamily.org.uk

www.England.nhs.uk