

Parent/Guardian Information

Pastoral Care Advice

March 2021



DEAN CLOSE
PREPARATORY SCHOOL
CHELTENHAM

This information is intended to provide parents/guardians with some suggestions for managing the emotional concerns pupils may experience in advance of their return to school on March 8th.

Returning to school - managing anxiety in our children

The news of schools reopening for all pupils on March 8th will have been greeted by many with whoops of joy, for all the obvious reasons of being able to see friends again, participating in sport with others and being able to do extracurricular activities. For some pupils though, the prospect of returning to school will not generate the same euphoric response and may even come as a source of disappointment; this period of lockdown has allowed them to flourish in new and perhaps unexpected ways which they will miss when back at school. Some pupils will not exhibit the response we are expecting from them, which may be a cause for concern, and interpreting their emotions may need extra time invested by the adults around them, spent chatting about the weeks ahead.

The notes below offer some practical suggestions to help your child feel better prepared for the final three weeks of 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 is 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 catastrophising 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? Are they worried about being with larger groups, the distractions these might pose and the challenges found in friendships. For older pupils, their worry may stem from needing to take a covid test on their return.

Trying to anticipate such concerns will enable you to be better prepared in supporting them.

Listen

Finding a good time to check in with your son/daughter 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.

In addition to offering yourself as someone who will listen, please remind your son/daughter of the options they can take advantage of at school as well, if they feel the need to offload their concerns. Their form teacher or tutor is the obvious person to speak with, but Houseparents are also readily available, as is Mrs Hunt. In addition to these members of the pastoral team, any member of staff would be happy to find time to listen to your son/daughter.

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

Although you will have established routines during this time of remote learning, these will no doubt change again when we return to school. This may involve earlier starts to the day, stricter routines for the after school period and earlier bedtimes. Sudden changes, the night before school starts, should be avoided. To prepare for the best start back, resuming the routine for returning to school early on is preferable. From being more independent and able to choose how to spend their time, pupils will have the usual constraints of school life to manage once more; expect some 'kick back' and frustration as your son/daughter readjusts once more.

Oiling their social skills

Many children may find they are worrying about friendships - some pupils may feel they have drifted away from their 'normal' friends while others may have enjoyed the isolation and less sociable nature of lockdown. Anything you can do to encourage your child to make contact with their friends in advance of March 8th will help them to exercise the social 'muscle'. For those who are unsure about returning to school, making contact with a small number of friends again in the coming days may be a good idea and talking about their friends will help you to know how they are feeling about this aspect of the return.

Be realistic

It's important not to pretend that school will feel exactly the same as pre-lockdown - your child's expectations need to be managed and their concerns shared. 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 form groups, but having conversations about the expected reality of the next three weeks 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 - you are always there for your child - look for 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, 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 the 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@deanclouse.org.uk)

Useful associated websites:

www.Youngminds.org.uk www.Mentalhealth.org.uk www.Careforthefamily.org.uk www.England.nhs.uk