

TALKING WITH YOUR CHILDREN RETURNING TO SCHOOL

Gan - 1st Grade





KEEP IN MIND

- Be mindful of how you speak about the transition (not just to your kids) and model problem-solving, flexibility, compassion, and positive attitude. Children will follow your reactions.
- If your child expresses fear and anxiety, remind them that your family is healthy (if this is the case). Reassure them that you are doing everything you can to keep everyone safe and well. Carefully listen to what they share and respond honestly and with reassurance.
- If your family has been directly impacted by COVID-19 it is important to acknowledge this. Talk about how doctors and nurses help ill family members. Share ways that children can reach out to anyone who is ill (e.g. phone calls, handmade cards).
- If someone you know or a family member has passed away, help your child put their emotions into words, comfort your child, and share how you feel but without dwelling on the sad feelings. After a few minutes of talking and listening, shift the activity or topic to something that helps your child feel better, such as music, playing games, or making art.
- Help your child recognize silver linings and feel gratitude. Maybe you developed a new ritual at home, learned something new about each other, or formed new habits.



RE-SET ROUTINES

We recognize that we all developed habits during quarantine and that returning to school routines will take time to establish. We recommend that you practice the following *at least two weeks before school starts* in order to help ease your child's anxiety and prepare them for school:

1. Morning routines: Set your child's wake-up time to the time they will need to wake up for school. Have your child follow a morning routine that includes getting dressed and grooming. For many children it is helpful to have a visual reminder of the morning routine posted in a visible place.

2. Bedtime: Set your child up for success with step-by-step directions and clear expectations for a bedtime routine. Have your child in bed at the time that they would need to be in bed for school. Some kids might argue that they want to finish a TV show or a video game. Setting time limits in advance can be helpful.
3. Mealtime: Set regular mealtimes including breakfast, snack, lunch, and dinner. This will help your child better adapt to the school day and school week on nutritional and energy levels.
4. Chewing with mouth closed: Practice with your child chewing with mouth closed/not speaking with food in their mouth. This will help your child adjust to new health and hygiene routines and expectations. Children will be eating without masks on, and chewing with closed mouths will help prevent the spread of germs.
5. Masks: Find the mask that your child feels most comfortable wearing. Explain to your child that the mask is like a shield and it keeps germs from spreading. Practice with your child the correct way to wear a mask, making sure that the nose, mouth, and chin are **all** covered. Explain to your child that the germs will stay on the outside of the mask and won't get into their nose and mouth, so it is important that they do not touch the outside of the mask or under the mask. Practice with your child wearing the mask for longer periods of time every couple of days.
6. Hand washing: Practice a hand washing routine with your child that follows CDC recommendations.
 - a. Wet your hands with clean, running water.
 - b. Apply soap.
 - c. Scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds:
 - i. Rub your hands to completely cover both hands with soap.
 - ii. Rub your palms together.
 - iii. Rub your palm to the back of the opposite hand, repeating for each hand.
 - iv. Rubbed your interlaced fingers.
 - v. Rub your fingertips to the palm of the opposite hand, repeating for each hand.
 - d. Rinse your hands well under clean, running water.
 - e. Dry your hands using a clean paper towel, or air dry them.
7. Digital technology: Begin weaning children from regular use of internet and technology use. This will help reformat their alertness and concentration for in-person learning.

8. Saying goodbye: Create a consistent goodbye ritual in advance and practice the ritual. That helps the child know what to expect. This can be a high-five, a hug and a kiss, saying I love you-- whatever feels most natural for you and your child. Remember that this routine will happen outside of the school building this year.
9. Practice your path to school before the first day so the way is familiar for your child. Perhaps they can even lead the way or tell you the direction by the time school starts! This helps create a sense of predictability and familiarity.



TALK ABOUT THE TRANSITION

1. EXPLAIN

- Try language like this: *You know that there is coronavirus (COVID-19) that makes people sick, and we have needed to stay at home for a while to make sure that everyone stays healthy. We have been together for so long. I/We have been working from home, and you have been learning and playing at home. By staying away from other people, washing our hands, and wearing masks outside, we have made so many of the germs go away! So many of the germs have gone away that it is now safe to return to school. Pretty soon we will be taking you to the park to meet your school friends and teachers.*
- PAUSE to allow your child to respond.
- *The week after that, we will be taking you to school in the morning, and we will always come back home at the end of the day. That's a big change from what we've gotten used to, right?*
- PAUSE: Continue with the following bullet points unless your child will not be able to take in the information because they seem very upset, cry excessively, or actively refuse to participate in the conversation. If your child seems mildly upset or nervous, continue with the bullet points; more information can ease these feelings. Let your child know that you can see that they are worried about going back to school and that it is okay to feel that way. Also let your child know that you will continue to talk about returning to school, because you want to help them feel less nervous about school.
- *In order for us to continue to stay healthy, we need to continue to be safe. Some things at school will be the same and some will be a little different. When you are in school you will do the following:*
 - *You will stay with your class-- your friends and your teachers-- for the whole day, just like we stayed at home together. At school, you will not get as close to the other children as you are with our family. You will try*

not to touch each other, and you will have some space in your classroom between your desks or when you sit on the rug, just to make sure you don't share germs.

- *You will also wash your hands a few times a day to keep the germs away. Your teachers will tell you when you need to wash your hands, but if there are other times that you want to wash your hands, you just need to tell them and they will help you. They will also have hand sanitizer that you will probably use many times during the day.*
- *[For Gan] All of your teachers and almost all of your friends at your school will be wearing masks, like we do when we go outside or to a store. This might look a little funny, but the masks keep the germs away and will keep everyone healthy. Your teachers are going to help you wear your mask during the day, and also let you take breaks sometimes when you need them.*
- *[For K-1] All of your teachers and friends will be wearing masks at school. This is different and might look a little funny, but it is a good way to keep germs away and make sure that you and everyone stay healthy. When you are in school, you will need to wear your mask. We will find a mask that is comfortable for you to wear, and we will give you some extra ones to keep in school in case you need a replacement.*
- *Another thing that is going to be different is that you and your friends will each have a box with your school supplies, like pencils, crayons and glue. Your name will be on your box, so you and your teachers know which one is yours.*

2. PAUSE to DISCUSS. If your child doesn't volunteer any thoughts or feelings, try to prompt them with questions like these:

- *Do you have any questions?*
- *What do you think this might be like for you?*
- *Are you curious about any of this?*

3. EXPLAIN

- *Another change is that only teachers, students, and people who work at the school can come into the school. When we drop you off in the morning, we will say goodbye outside and you will go inside to see your teacher. It is okay if it feels a little weird to say goodbye in the morning, because we are not used to it after being together for so long. I know your teachers and friends will be there with you all day and you will do a lot of fun things in the classroom.*
- *Let's practice how we will say goodbye in the morning...*
 - *Each family should have a ritual, which should be short and confident. It is important that you say a confident goodbye. That shows your child that they are safe. When a parent is anxious or upset to leave their children, it signals to the child that something about leaving them is not okay.*

- Sample routine: One hug, parent says, “Have fun in school! I want to hear all about your day when I pick you up. See you soon!” Child says, “Have fun at work! I’ll see you at pick up/at home.” Both say, “I love you,” and then the child goes into the building.

4. REINFORCE

- Talk everything through with your child, no matter how young they are. Children, and even babies, pick up on adults’ speech cadences and emotions. When you speak in a calm voice, it helps young children have a sense of reassurance and predictability. Have conversations in natural and engaging ways. Tell them that they are going to go to school and that there are going to be other kids [and toys] there. They will get to play with toys, have a snack and lunch with their friends, take a nap together, and go home at the end of the day. After school starts, continue re-telling this narrative to reinforce the sense of reassurance.
- Books are a great way to help children build resilience. They can help your child manage potential stress by helping them to visualize situations in advance of experiencing them. They can also help children to verbalize their thoughts and feelings before they directly encounter the situation. Here are some book suggestions:
 - Feelings:
 - *In My Heart: A Book of Feelings (Growing Hearts)* by Jo Witek
 - *The Pigeon Has Feelings, Too!* by Mo Willems
 - Worry:
 - *Ruby Finds a Worry (Big Bright Feelings)* by Tom Percival
 - *Wemberly Worried* by Kevin Henkes
 - Fear of separation:
 - *The Kissing Hand* by Audrey Penn
 - *I Love You All Day Long* by Francesca Rusackas
 - *Llama Llama Misses Mama* by Anna Dewdney
 - School anxiety:
 - *Mae's First Day of School* by Kate Berube
 - *The Kissing Hand* by Audrey Penn
 - *First Grade Jitters* by Robert Quackenbush
 - School:
 - *The Pigeon HAS to Go to School!* by Mo Willems
 - *Maisy Goes to Preschool: A Maisy First Experiences Book* by Lucy Cousins
 - *Time For School, Mouse!* By Laura Numeroff and Felicia Bond
 - COVID related:
 - [*Thank You, Helpers!: Doctors, Nurses, Teachers, Grocery Workers, and More Who Care for Us*](#) by Patricia Hegerty and Michael Emmerson (4-8 years)
 - [*Smiling from Ear to Ear*](#) by Kaitlin Chu
- [Elmo learns how to wear a mask](#)
- [A story about seeing other people wearing a mask](#)

- If you would like to watch and discuss videos with respect to mask wearing, we recommend this list of videos, divided by age group:
<https://www.weareteachers.com/mask-videos-for-kids/>.
- Other resources:
 - [How to Ease Your Child's Separation Anxiety](#)
 - [Back to School Anxiety](#)
 - [Coping With Back To School Anxiety](#)
 - [How to talk to kids about wearing a mask](#)



TIME TO GO TO SCHOOL

1. Bring something small that is familiar to your child and reminds them of home. It might be a toy, a special cloth, or a picture of the family.
2. Say a confident goodbye. That shows your child that they are safe. When a parent is anxious or upset to leave their children, it signals to the child that something is not okay for them to be left there.
3. Allow your child to lead the way that you have practiced.