

Tips for Parents and Carers – supporting young people as they return to school or college

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Developed by Leicestershire Educational Psychology Service

Returning to school or college after the 'lockdown' is likely to be an exciting but also worrying time for children and young people. As a parent or carer, you might be a little anxious too. This is perfectly understandable. But there are some simple things you can do to help them to prepare for their 'new normal'. We hope that the following tips will help you support your child's successful return to school/college.

Time to talk – your child is likely to experience a mix of emotions about returning to school or college, from excited and eager, to concern, worry and anxiety. Be available to listen to your child's thoughts and concerns, and help them to explore and find ways of managing more difficult feelings.



Offer reassurance – explain that these feelings are normal. Like all feelings, they will change and come and go.

Be a positive role model – model coping strategies that you use to help you feel calm and positive e.g. being active and using breathing and calming techniques. If appropriate, talk about your thoughts about returning to 'normal' life and/or work and the ways that you are managing and coping with difficult feelings.



Talk about school or college – talk about the routines, rules and practices that they were familiar with. Some of these will have changed (e.g. social distancing and hygiene measures, staying in teaching 'bubbles') but many will have stayed the same (e.g. the building, grounds, adults and students). Focus on the positives, for example, seeing their friends again.

Routines – in most families, routines around work, play, sleep and time spent on digital technology have become flexible. This is perfectly normal and something all young people are familiar with, particularly during summer holidays. Prepare for school/college going back the same way that you would approach the end of the summer holidays.



Sleep routines – during term time, a minimum of 9 to 11 hours of good sleep is recommended for 11-13 year olds, with 8 to 9 hours for 14-17 year olds. Encourage your child to start returning to a normal term-time sleep routine at least two weeks before a return to school/college. Avoid long lie-ins (especially at weekends) and push sleep forward by 15 minutes each day to help them adjust to earlier bedtimes and wake-ups.

Encourage healthy routines – healthy habits around exercise and diet will help to improve sleep, learning and wellbeing. Encourage at least 1 hour of exercise a day.



Manage screen time – if possible, don't have screens (e.g. TV, mobile phone, tablet) in the bedroom at night. Encourage your child to have at least 1 hour of 'screen free' time before bed. Use a blue light filter or app if possible to stop the light from screens interfering with sleep.

Helpful tools and resources

Helping to manage worries:

- Dana and the Doom Merchant is a story about change, loss and transition; what helps and what doesn't. A narrated version can be found here: [Dana and the Doom Merchant](#)
- [Reading Well](#) recommends expert endorsed books about mental health in general, including advice and information about issues like anxiety, stress, confidence and self-esteem.
- NHS Grampian have produced resource packs for different age groups and areas of need, focusing on coping with anxiety and worry around COVID-19: [COVID Resources](#)



When things are feeling tough:

- Approaches such as CBT and Mindfulness can be used to help young people to begin to explore and manage these feelings and promote resilience.
- [CAMHS Resources](#) offers a range of suggested downloads, apps and book recommendations. They also provide website links to support for young people and families including **Young Minds**, **Child Bereavement UK**, and **MindMate**.
- [Kooth](#) is an online mental health service for children and young people (11-18 years) providing free access to a community of peers and experienced counsellors.



Be a positive role model:

- The Leicestershire NHS '[5 Ways to Wellbeing](#)' provides 5 helpful steps (including links to local resources) to help improve mental health and wellbeing during these challenging times.



Healthy Routines and Sleep:

- The NHS provides guidance on:
 - [Sleep for Teenagers](#)
 - [Exercise for children and young people](#)
 - [Healthy Eating for Teens](#)
 - [Health for Teens](#) is a website designed for teenagers and covers everything they need to know about keeping healthy and well including facts about COVID-19.



Leicestershire Educational Psychology Service Helpline – available daily during the coronavirus pandemic to offer telephone advice and support to Leicestershire parents and carers.

- Tel: **0116 305 5100**; **Monday to Friday, between 9am and 11.30am** including school holidays.
- We have also developed a parent and carer guide on [Supporting children and young people with additional needs at home during COVID 19](#).