



# BRIDGEND CARERS CENTRE

## Returning to School after Closure due to Covid 19 for Children with Disabilities

You will probably have decided by now if your child/ren will be returning to school in the forthcoming weeks. Some of you may be continuing to shield, whilst others may feel that your child would benefit from a return to routine. Speaking to some parents I know there are concerns about disrupting your children by sending them back for just a couple of days before the summer holidays, as well as valid concerns about risk to health. Others are worried that without this return, before summer, their child will find it more difficult to cope with transition.

Really, this is unique situation where there is no clear guidance of what is the best choice. Each child has individual needs and we can only do what is right for our families. It may be that you will be sending one child back to school but keeping the other one at home. You may have sought guidance from your school/ teachers to help you make a decision. You may have spoken to your child/ren to see what they want to do. The decisions made regarding school need to work for your family, and as parents, the decision you choose is based on the in-depth knowledge you have of your child.

If you have decided to send your child/ren back to school I think there are very few parents who will not have some anxiety regarding their return. The children themselves are likely to feel anxious too, although some may be excited to see their friends and teachers.

Children may have heard, seen or read things that make them feel very anxious about Coronavirus. It is worth speaking to them about what they have heard and separating the fact from fiction. It is worth reminding them that we can ALL do things to ensure that we keep safe such as handwashing, maintaining social distance and following the rules set out by the school.

It's definitely worth talking about the positive news stories such as Clap for Carers, Captain Tom Moore raising millions for the NHS, the drop in pollution and spending more time together as a family.

### **IF THEY ARE RETURNING TO SCHOOL**

**Listen to them** - Let them express their concerns and take time to listen to them without other distractions. Go through the things they can control such as using hand gel,

maintaining social distance, and reassure them on the things they can't control such as who they will be in a bubble with, getting used to new rules.

### **Remind them that ALL children will be in the same position**

**Prepare them** – remind them about handwashing, have hand gel and tissues packs ready for them. Get their bag ready the night before. Buy familiar food for their packed lunch. Explain what will happen when they return home. Are you expecting them to shower and change into fresh clothes straight away?

### **Planning ahead can give a level of control over the situation. It can also help them to feel safer**

**Familiarise them** – show them photos of how the school is laid out, if you have been sent them, or explain to them how it will have changed. For example, their temperature may be taken on arrival, they will have to maintain social distance rules, they will be in much smaller class sizes.

### **Print out the photos so they can view them whenever they want, plan a social story with them, use role play to help them prepare**

**Reassure them** – you may need to offer them the same reassurance again and again leading up to their return. Let them know the school will be taking it very seriously and everything has been planned around keeping them safe. Try not to show your own anxiety, although using phrases such as 'I can understand why you are feeling anxious', 'I know this all feels strange at the moment' shows empathy for their situation.

### **Children are looking to you for reassurance and need to see that you are comfortable with their return to school (this is where your acting skills may come in handy!)**

**Praise them** – Let them know you are proud of them and they are doing really well. Think of examples over the past weeks where they have shown resilience, or done something challenging, and celebrate these successes. This could be things like joining you for a walk, despite being anxious about going outside, leaning to tie their laces, playing nicely with their siblings or doing some school work.

### **Children, of all ages, want to have praise and recognition of positive behaviour**

**Reward them** – Think of something you can do with them when they return home. Cooking their favourite dinner, watching their favourite show or letting them play on their console. Are they working towards a reward on a star chart? If so perhaps they could have several stars for completing a day at school.

**Think about rewarding them even if they only make it as far as the school door or need to be picked up early. They have still made an effort to return to school**

**Let them** – it isn't the time to enforce the usual rules you have if they are acting out or can't sleep that evening. Their adrenaline is likely to be high and they may be unable to control their behaviour. Their normal school routine has been totally disrupted and children that struggle already with change are likely to find it very difficult. Not only did they leave school without warning, they are expected to go back into a whole new system.

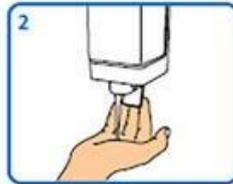
**Don't take it personally if they lash out, you are their safe space, even more so at the moment when everything else has been turned upside down.**

**Try not to ask too many questions straight away – they need some downtime like we would if we've had a stressful day at work or home**

# Hand-washing technique with soap and water



1 Wet hands with water



2 Apply enough soap to cover all hand surfaces



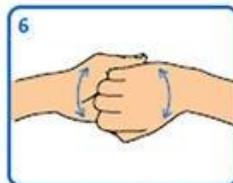
3 Rub hands palm to palm



4 Rub back of each hand with palm of other hand with fingers interlaced



5 Rub palm to palm with fingers interlaced



6 Rub with back of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked



7 Rub each thumb clasped in opposite hand using a rotational movement



8 Rub tips of fingers in opposite palm in a circular motion



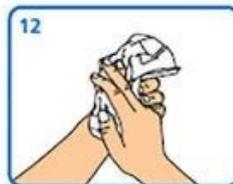
9 Rub each wrist with opposite hand



10 Rinse hands with water



11 Use elbow to turn off tap



12 Dry thoroughly with a single-use towel



13 Hand washing should take 15-30 seconds



<https://youngminds.org.uk>

How can I help my child?

All children and young people get anxious at times, and this is a normal part of their development as they grow up and develop their 'survival skills', so they can face challenges in the wider world. We all have different levels of stress we can cope with - some people are just naturally more anxious than others, and are quicker to get stressed or worried. There are many ways you can help your child to manage their anxiety.

### **These are things that can really make a difference:**

1. Talk to your child about anxiety, what is happening in their body and why it happens. Many children and young people don't know what they are feeling when they are anxious, and it can be very frightening and overwhelming. They might even think they are very ill or that they are having a heart attack.
2. Help them to recognise anxious feelings so they can tell when they are becoming anxious and can ask for help.
3. Tell your child it will be okay, and the anxiety will pass. It can be helpful to describe the anxiety as a wave to ride or surf that gets smaller after it peaks.
4. Get your child to [breathe deeply and slowly](#), in through their nose for three counts and out through their mouth for three counts.
5. Distract them by focusing on something else.
6. Give them a cuddle or hold their hand if they will let you - touch can be soothing.
7. It can help to talk to your child about finding a safe place in their mind - somewhere that they feel relaxed and happy. It may be a grandparent's or friend's house or a holiday beside the sea which they can picture when 'wrong thoughts' come into their head or they are feeling anxious. Sometimes holding a memento, like a seashell or pebble, can help.
8. If your child is feeling the need to check things or repeat certain actions, suggest they count up to 10 before they start checking as a delaying tactic. [This website](#) has some good ideas.
9. Encourage your child to notice what makes them anxious. Talking it through can help but your child could also try keeping a diary or a 'worry book'.
10. Make a 'worry box'. Your child can write each worry down and post it in the box out of sight. Small children will enjoy decorating the box too. They can leave the worries in there for, say, a week to see if they were worth worrying about (if not they can be torn up). Alternatively, you could designate a specific 'worry time' for around 10 or 20 minutes, (but not too close to bedtime, or when the child is in bed), so worries can be saved up for that time. This gives the message that we are in control of their worries and not vice versa.
11. Work on positive-thinking. Name their worst case scenarios and think through together how to sort out the situation if it happens, e.g. 'I'm worried that we'll miss the bus.' 'What do you think we could do if that happens?' 'We could get the next bus'.
12. Help them maintain a healthy lifestyle with regular exercise to reduce the levels of stress hormones, good sleeping habits, calm bedtime routines, limited screen or computer time in the evening, and a healthy diet.

Some other useful links:

<https://www.bridgend.gov.uk/residents/children-and-young-people/bridgend-youth-support/>

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Back-to-school-for-Wales>

[https://search3.openobjects.com/mediamanager/ealing/directory/files/top\\_tips\\_for\\_preparing\\_your\\_child\\_for\\_returning\\_to\\_school\\_-1.pdf](https://search3.openobjects.com/mediamanager/ealing/directory/files/top_tips_for_preparing_your_child_for_returning_to_school_-1.pdf)

<https://www.winstonswish.org/preparing-children-return-school/>

<http://www.starsteam.org.uk/coronavirus-resources>