



How to support your child for a successful return to school?

Supporting Children Returning to School

Returning to school after a break can represent a significant adjustment and create anxiety for both children and their parents and carers. Here are some effective ways for you to support them and increase their chances of success:

1. Establish a Routine:

- **Consistent Bedtime:** Ensure they get enough sleep.
- **Regular Mealtimes:** A predictable schedule helps with overall well-being.
- **Homework Time:** Set aside a specific time for homework.

2. Open Communication:

- **Talk About Feelings:** Encourage them to express their emotions.
- **Listen Actively:** Show that you're interested in their thoughts.
- **Address Concerns:** Help them navigate any worries or fears.

3. Gradual Transition:

- **Short Days Initially:** In the cases of children who experience high anxiety or have had a previous negative experience, talk to the school and see whether it is possible, start with shorter school days or part-time attendance. Remember, the school has a duty of care and must be able to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate your child's needs.
- **Familiar Activities:** Reinforce their connection to school through extracurricular activities, which can help establish and embed positive relationships with staff and their peers.

4. Healthy Lifestyle:

- **Balanced Diet:** Nourish their bodies with nutritious food – not too much sugar or too many carbs!
- **Regular Exercise:** Physical activity can boost mood and energy. Try to go on walks or runs. Not only is this healthy exercise but is a great opportunity to talk and engage with your child.
- **Limit Screen Time:** Reduce distractions and promote sleep. Although this can be a difficult one, a reasoned, negotiated agreement is far more likely to succeed than an arbitrarily imposed one.

5. Positive Reinforcement:

- **Praise and Encouragement:** Celebrate their achievements, big or small.
- **Reward System:** Use positive incentives to motivate them.
- **Avoid Comparisons:** Focus on their individual progress, strengths and address their weaknesses by taking a solution-based approach.

6. Seek Professional Help if Needed:

- **Counselling:** If your child is struggling, consider asking the school or your GP to make a referral for professional support. The earlier this is done, the more likely it is to be successful.
- **Support Groups:** Connect with other parents who are facing similar challenges. It is invariably harder to address challenges if you feel isolated. Don't underestimate the power of sharing tips and experiences.

7. Involve the School:

- **Stay Informed:** Communicate with teachers about your child's needs. Whilst your concerns make you highly charged and emotional, it is always better to stay calm and focus. Plan what you are going to say to the school beforehand, anticipate their responses and how you need to respond to them. Be politely persistent and don't be fobbed off.
- **Request Reasonable Adjustments:** If necessary, discuss potential adjustments. Some schools may seek to hide behind robust policies but if these discriminate in any way, either directly or indirectly, there is legislation to protect your child. Sometimes, schools need to be reminded of this.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance>

- **Build a Partnership:** Work together in a triangular partnership: parent-child-school to foster sound communication and understanding and to ensure a positive school experience. If you openly display your exasperation and criticise the school in front of your child, then this partnership is unlikely to succeed.

A final few words, loving a child is not about giving them everything they want. Children require unconditional love, safe in the knowledge that their parents are in control. When being firm, always show your child respect, remain in control and rise above any attempt to “press your buttons”. In this way, you will have the best possible chance of navigating the often stormy waters of parenthood.

By implementing these strategies, you can help both yourself and your child feel confident and prepared for the new school year – all the very best.

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