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| St. Michael's House: Children’s and Young Person’s Services |
| Tips to Support Your Child’s Return to School |
| Responding to COVID 19 |

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**Tips for Preparing for Your Child’s Return to School**

Talking to your child about returning to school:

Consider when is the best time to talk to your child about returning to school. For some children this may be now as they may be hearing others talk about it or see news on television or social media. For other children it may be more meaningful to discuss the return to school closer to the time. Using a calendar to mark off each day to the first day of school can be helpful to provide your child with a clear sense of when the return to school will occur.



Reintroducing school-time routines:

To support your child to adjust to the return to school it would be helpful to reintroduce school bedtimes at least two weeks before the return date. Also encourage your child get up each morning at the time they would usually get up at if they were going to school. Follow the typical school time morning routine as much as is possible, e.g. have breakfast, get dressed and try to go out, even if just for a walk. If mealtimes at home have become unstructured try to get your child into the habit of sitting at the table when eating as this will be required in school. A visual schedule may help with this re-introduction to routine and scheduling.

Re-familiarise your child with school:

As well as talking about school spend time looking at pictures of school. If possible walk or drive the route to school. If available, show your child photos of their class teacher and SNA and any other staff who visit the school regularly. Talk to your child about the people in their school and class, i.e. using other children’s names and looking at photos, e.g. class calendar. Make reference to school language, e.g. school bag, names of rooms in school, etc.

Re-familiarise your child with school paraphernalia:

Spend time helping your child to practice opening and closing their school bag, pencil case, lunch box and drinks bottle, packing and unpacking their school bag, putting on and off their coat, etc. Even if your child was previously able to complete these tasks independently it is important to check that they are still able to do them as it has been so long since they were in school.

Practice Social Skills:

Many children have had limited opportunities for social interactions. Social skills are an important aspect of school life. At home practice social skills such as initiating play, turn taking, making requests, sharing, etc. When practicing social skills remember to include any relevant Covid related practices. Visual aids such as choice boards may help your child to communicate in social situations.

School and New Covid Regulations:

Talk to your child about any changes they may experience, due to new Covid regulations, when they return to school. It would be helpful to use visuals and social stories to highlight these changes. Please see the references at the end of this document or contact your SMH key contact for support with this. Take opportunities when out to point out Covid related signs, discuss their meaning with your child and use them as an opportunity to practice Covid etiquette e.g. washing hands, coughing and sneezing into their elbow, maintaining social distancing when queuing, etc. Check with your child’s school whether adults working with your child will be wearing PPE. If so, consider wearing PPE at home so that your child becomes familiar with PPE. It may be worthwhile contacting your child’s schools to discuss their individual support needs regarding following Covid regulations in school particularly if they are having difficulty following any of the new Covid regulations.

**Things to Consider when your Child Returns to School**

Changes in Your Child:

As schools will have been closed for so long everyone will need to readjust when returning to school. For your child this may pose some difficulties. During the Covid restrictions some children enjoyed being at home and not having to contend with the demands of school life. Other children may have missed the routine and structure that school can provide. When your child returns to school you may notice some changes in them. Changes in mood, appetite, sleep pattern, toileting and behaviour are common when children are adjusting to differences in their familiar routine. Thus, it is possible that you may see some of these changes in your child when they return to school. Returning to school may prove to be tiring and, perhaps, anxiety provoking for your child. Try not to worry about such changes. Offer your child reassurance. Discuss any changes with school staff so they can also support your child. The following ideas may help you to support your child to readjust to school:

One-to-one time:

Your child will have spent a lot of time with you and other close family members over the past five months. It is likely that your child will miss you when they return to school. If possible set aside some one-to-one time with your child each day. Spend the time doing one of your child’s favoured activities.

Time & planning

As your child has not been in school for a long time it is likely that everything, from getting ready in the morning to completing homework, will take much longer!! Factor in extra time for every school related activity to avoid situations becoming stressful. Consider whether you can prepare for the morning time routine the night before or link with your child’s teacher about reducing homework for a while.

Supporting your Child to Adjust to the Return to School:

Many children have spent the past five months at home in familiar surroundings. Consider if the return to school will be overwhelming in terms of the stimuli (noise, other children, etc.) and demands made in school. Discuss with your child’s school whether they may need periods of quiet/calm throughout the school day. Conversely, some children will require more physical activity and may benefit from movement breaks during the day. For most children it may be necessary to reduce demands and expectations in the initial stages of the return to school. This may mean your child completes less school work or tasks at home until they have settled back to school. If this is the case, try not to worry that your child is not completing the same volume of work or to the same standard as when they were last in school. The important thing at the moment is for your child to adjust to the return to school.

Communication with School:



Communication is key to ensuring that your child’s return to school is successful. Contact your child’s school to discuss their level of understanding of Covid guidelines and to plan for any supports they may have in this area. Some parents may have specific concerns about their child in terms of health vulnerabilities or response to the new Covid procedures. Talk to your child’s school about communication throughout the school year and agree on a method of communication. This could be via daily communication book, email, phonecall, etc.

**Parental Self-care**

Covid 19 is an unprecedented experience for all of us. It has caused immense stress for most people, especially for parents and families of children with intellectual disabilities. The return to school is welcomed but it may be challenging for children initially. Thus, it is very important for parents to look after themselves and take time to engage in self care activities. Self-care refers to activities and practices that we can engage in on a regular basis to reduce stress and enhance our short and longer-term health and well-being. Self-care is crucial to improving your psychological and emotional wellbeing. Below are some self-care activities:

Daily Restorative Activities:

It is really important to ensure that you do at least one restorative activity for yourself each day. A restorative activity is one that helps you to unwind, relax and reflect. Try to schedule at least fifteen minutes everyday that is time just for you. Restorative activities vary for each person, e.g. exercise, listening to music, having a bath, making a favourite hot drink, journaling, watching a favourite television programme, etc.

Support Network

Connecting with family and friends who form your support network is a key part of self care. Regularly talking to people in your support network is important as they provide vital emotional support. Talking about your concerns with family and friends can help to reduce any stress or anxiety you may be feeling. In addition, other people can provide a different perspective and offer solutions to problems. It is okay to look for help and support. If you feel that you do not currently have a support network think of friends or family who have offered to help in the past and ask for support.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness can help lessen anxiety and stress. There are many ways to practice mindfulness in your everyday life, for example, yoga, turning off social media and technology, etc. Breathing exercises can be very beneficial. The following is a simple breathing exercise:

*Tummy breathing: Sitting upright with both feet on the ground and back against the chair, one hand on your chest and one hand on your tummy. Breathe in deeply through your nose and feel your tummy rise, and then feel it lower as you slowly breathe out through your mouth.*

Self-care Wheel



**Resources**

**General Information on School and Covid 19**

[www.gov.ie/backtoschool](http://www.gov.ie/backtoschool)

[www.gov.ie/reopening-our-primary-and-special-schools](http://www.gov.ie/reopening-our-primary-and-special-schools)

[www.gov.ie/reopening-our-post-primary-schools](http://www.gov.ie/reopening-our-post-primary-schools)

**General Resources on Covid 19**

[www.smh.ie/services/children/covid-19-family-supports](http://www.smh.ie/services/children/covid-19-family-supports)

**Social Stories**

[www.carolgraysocialstories.com](http://www.carolgraysocialstories.com)

[www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips](http://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips)

**Visuals for School**

[www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/visual-supports](http://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/visual-supports)

[www.ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Supporting-children-and-young-people-with-ASD-during-the-Covid-19-pandemic-Visuals-to-support-understanding.pdf](http://www.ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Supporting-children-and-young-people-with-ASD-during-the-Covid-19-pandemic-Visuals-to-support-understanding.pdf)

**Relaxation & Mindfulness Exercises for Parents**

<http://www.beaumont.ie/index.jsp?p=528&n=532&a=0>

**Autism**

AsIAm – Bridge Back to School Resource Booklet

**Clinical Supports**

If your child has support needs in a specific area and you would like to access clinical supports in St Michael’s House download a SAT referral form from the Children and Young Person’s section of the St Michael’s House website.