

## Northamptonshire Virtual School: September Return To School

The Government has updated its [advice to carers](#) regarding the return to school in September. We have detailed some of the points here, some Top Tips that you may find helpful in preparing your child for a return to school after the summer break, and some advice from an educational psychologist.

### Government Expectations: Attendance

It will be compulsory for all looked-after children of compulsory school age to return to school in September. This includes those that are shielding or in households that are shielding. The exception is some pupils under the care of a specialist health professional (discuss with the professional at the next appointment if needed), or those self-isolating due to coronavirus. Colleges and Early Years settings are also returning.

### Top Tips to prepare for the return to school

1. Involve your child and discuss this document with them as far as this is age appropriate. Children of all ages appreciate being involved. The more they know about how school might be different, the more you can plan together, and the more likely it is they will feel comfortable about the return.
2. The government says it recognises that children, and especially the youngest children, cannot socially distance. Schools are asked to create 'bubbles' – class size at primary and KS3, if they can; year group size at KS4, where children do not mix outside their 'bubble'.
3. Look after your own welfare so you can support your child. The last few months have been challenging for many of us and so make sure you draw on support from your supervising social worker and carer network groups. Your experiences are often shared by many other carers.
4. Get bedtime routines sorted over the summer. It's easy to let bedtime slide over a break and children can form the habit of lying in very late. Agree with your child a gradual change to bedtime / getting up time over a one/two week period if needed. They will struggle to get up at a very different time all in one go.
5. Your school should be in touch with you to let you know what changes it is going to be making (eg. staggered start times, hygiene and behaviour rules etc) in order to reduce risk. Talk these through with your child, and contact the school's Designated Teacher for looked-after children if you have any queries. Many schools will look very different to this time last year and it's important to know that some anxiety is perfectly normal.
6. Avoid using public transport to get to school if you can – note all children over 11 will require face coverings on all public transport. Walking or cycling, where possible, is a great way to keep children fit and healthy.
7. Ask the child's social worker or Designated Teacher to ensure any worries or concerns are discussed and documented in the Personal Education Plan (PEP) so that support can be considered by the school.

### Supporting Anxiety and Well Being: an educational psychologist writes...

Times of transition can create anxiety for all children, especially those who do not feel security in their life and especially at a time when there is a real potential health risk in meeting other people.

- Enable the child to have an understanding of what will happen at school and what the risks may be.
- Encourage problem solving in relation to things which may cause anxiety: what might be a solution?
- Encourage the child to engage in positive activities that they have always enjoyed.
- Teach the child to use a breathing exercise to regulate their arousal – breathe in using the abdomen, pause for five seconds, breathe out slowly while saying a relaxing word.
- Promote helpful thinking by reframing negative fears with alternative thoughts of positive opportunities.
- Rebuild healthy social connections with peers and adults alike.

Above all, be empathetic and listen to the child's concerns, taking them seriously.