

BARNET

HELPING CHILDREN
BACK TO SCHOOL

Back to School Guide

For parents, carers
and guardians



About this guide

“Our priority is to ensure that Barnet’s learning spaces are safe for all to be in. Every school is first looking at the potential risks of returning more children to the classroom and how they can reduce the overall risks for pupils and for staff.”

Cllr Dan Thomas, Leader of Barnet Council



As the Government starts to ease lockdown restrictions, we’re working on opening our schools and return more of our children back to the classroom. From early June, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 will be the first to return. Face-to-face contact with Years 10 and 12 will resume from mid-June.

It is our shared priority to ensure that Barnet’s learning spaces are safe for children and teaching and support staff. We need to remember that each school is different. Each school is reviewing the risks and will take into consideration things like the layout of their buildings and the age groups they teach and will only open when they are confident that they can provide a safe environment. A gradual, phased return will ensure a smaller number of children in the school, which means there will be more room to social distance.

Your child’s welfare comes first

We appreciate that some children will be worried and will need additional support to during the transition back to school. While we are encouraging parents, carers and guardians to start planning for their children to return to school in June, we want to be clear that the timetable for a child to return to school, at this time, is ultimately your decision as you know your child best.

Your child’s school will be in touch with you to help you make decisions and plans about your child’s return to school. The school will let you know when they will re-open and what steps they have put into place to ensure social distancing guidance and health and safety measures can be followed. We are assisting schools to help vulnerable children to return to school by ensuring they have a tailor-made plan to support them.

This guide is packed with information and tips to help you manage your child’s return to school. This includes travelling to school safely; putting routines for bed time, waking up and mealtimes back in place; how to build on your child and families resilience by focusing on strengths and supporting your child’s emotional wellbeing. You can find out more by scrolling ...here.



Managing anxiety

Is your child worried about going back to school?

Psychologists at the Anna Freud Centre share some simple tips on how to help your child manage their feelings of anxiety.



1. Get talking

Create a space for conversation to happen, but don’t force it. Be open and consistently available, so your child can talk when they are ready. It may be easier to talk while doing an activity such as going for a walk or drawing.

2. Be calm

Showing that you are relaxed helps your child to mimic this behaviour, which can reassure them that things might be difficult, but they are manageable.

3. Listen and emphasise

Spend time listening to your child, asking questions, showing an interest and put yourself in their shoes. Try and normalise their feelings of worry, anger or sadness and acknowledge that everybody can experience this – it’s normal!



4. Putting it into perspective

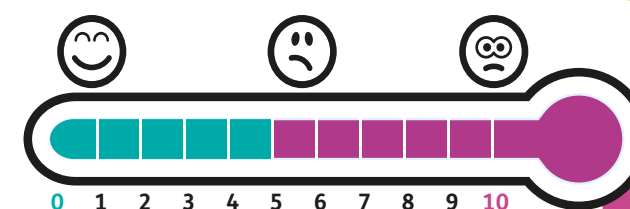
A worry is a thought, not necessarily a fact. After listening to you child, ask if your child’s worry is likely to happen, if so, what would it mean if it did? Try and explore alternative ways of looking at things this might help to put their worries into perspective.

5. Keep to a routine

Try and understand what makes the anxiety worse such as too much TV, screen time, or not seeing friends and make changes to reduce their effects. Remind them how important it is to be kind and take care of themselves.

6. Role play

Pump up the positivity to boost their confidence and ability to cope. Take turns and practice different scenarios and responses by role playing. ‘We can’t do X... but we can do Y...’ and remember to praise your child’s strengths and talents.



7. Check-in

See how these steps have helped by monitoring your child’s response. This can be done using an ‘Anxiety Thermometer’ on a scale of 0 being calm to 10 being extremely anxious. This will help you to understand how your child is feeling at any point and take the right steps if they need extra support.



Anna Freud Centre has produced a series of expert podcasts to help parents understand and manage child and family mental health problems. The series, Child in Mind, is presented by BBC Radio 4 presenter Claudia Hammond. In each 20-minute episode, she discusses an important issue in child and family mental health with an expert and a young person or parent. Listen here: <https://www.annafreud.org/parents-and-carers/child-in-mind/>



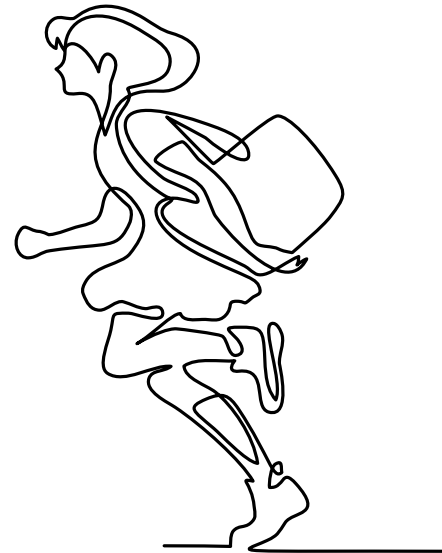
Getting to school safely

We are asking parents and carers follow the guidance below to help children and young people travel safely back to school:



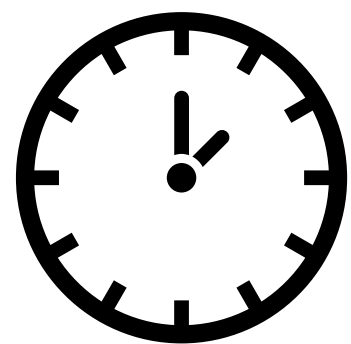
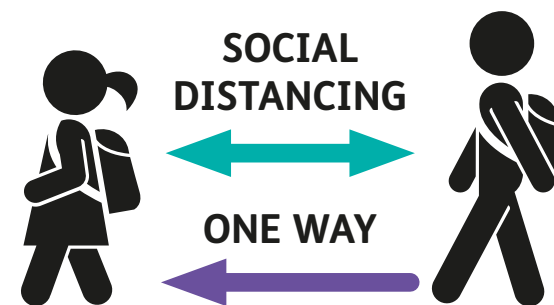
Avoid public transport - walk, cycle or scoot to school, wherever possible

This method of getting to school has an added health benefit of physical exercise. Getting some fresh air before and after school is great for your child's wellbeing. Don't forget to wear a helmet!



Adhere to appropriate social distancing measures outside school gates.

Your school will be in touch and communicate any new arrangements, such as the introduction of a one-way system with different points for drop-off and collection. We are supporting schools to create new signage and spraying pavements to make social distancing as clear as can be.



Adhere to the staggered start of the school day and collection times for different year groups

Your school will be in touch to let you know what time to drop off and pick up your child. Schools may need to make changes to their start and finish times to reduce pressure at peak travel times.



We are encouraging schools to participate in Transport for London's (TfL) STARS programme. STARS is TfL's community project to inspire young Londoners at over 1,500 schools, nurseries and colleges to travel sustainably, actively, responsibly and safely by championing walking, scooting and cycling. Contact your school to find out if they are taking part.

Below are some useful resources and links:

You can plan your cycle route by using TfL's journey planner (<https://tfl.gov.uk/plan-a-journey/>)

Visit <https://tfl.gov.uk/travel-information/safety/road-safety-advice/driving-and-cycling-safety> for cycling safety tips.

Link to 'Walk about, talk about' booklet for road safety and adults role modelling responsible habits

<http://content.tfl.gov.uk/walk-about-talk-about-leaflet.pdf>

Sleep eazzzzzy...

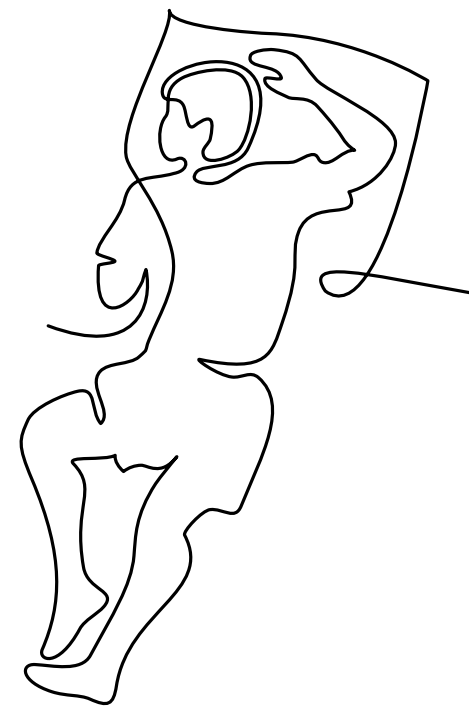
Lockdown has disrupted our daily routines.

We've felt the pressure of having to carefully monitor every aspect of our lives in order to stay productive, which has made many of us feel very out of control. When one thing goes wrong, it can hit you a lot harder if you're isolated.

Parents' and carers' worries about kids' bedtimes having crept a little later each day during lockdown is now giving way to increased anxiety about how to get their children back on track and back to school. Children have also been feeling anxious as they worry about what school will be like under the new rules.

Preparation plays an essential role in helping reduce stress. As schools open, it's important we adapt to a new sleep pattern so that we feel energised and ready for whatever the day has to offer!

Nothing beats a good night's sleep and Sleep Council has provided some top tips for families preparing for their new school routines.



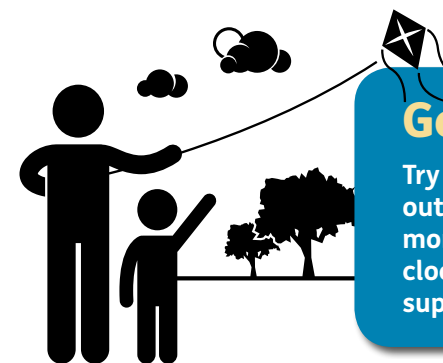
Discipline yourself:

Try to keep to a consistent bedtime/wake time. If things have drifted later, then start to move them slowly by about 15 minutes every few days until they are back on track.



Be consistent:

Our body clocks thrive on routine. Having a set wake-up time seven days a week is important.



Get fresh air:

Try to encourage youngsters to get outside for at least half an hour each morning. Daylight supports our body clocks, helping us to wake up and suppress the sleep hormone.

Go screen-free:

Make the hour before bed a screen-free zone. Screens produce a blue light that tricks our bodies into thinking it is daylight and makes us feel more alert.

Dim the lights:

Reducing brightness helps youngsters to produce melatonin, this is the sleep hormone that makes us feel tired and helps us to nod-off.



Wind down:

A bath (if they enjoy one) followed by a warm milky drink and reading them a book is a simple and effective wind-down. This gets children relaxed and ready for bed.

Talk it out:

Schedule in time to talk about worries away from the bedtime routine. Doing so will make bedtime a positive and relaxing experience.



For more information about sleep support visit www.thesleepcharity.org.uk
<https://sleepcouncil.org.uk/how-to-get-bedtimes-back-on-track/>

Ideas for building your child's resilience

Resilience is seen when individuals have a greater ability to “bounce back” when faced with difficulties and achieve positive outcomes.

Before the lockdown many school communities were already taking a whole school approach towards promoting health and wellbeing as part of their curriculum.

Also we know that secure and stable relationships between parents/carers and children are important.

Six factors known to be associated with resilience* are:

- Secure base
- Education
- Friendships
- Talents and interests
- Positive values
- Social competencies

When parents/carers are reliable and children have good physical and emotional care like receiving praise, positive attention, acceptance, being kept safe, having nutritious food and regular hugs, they can be helped to feel good about themselves. Having a wider network of support such as good relationships with friends, siblings and wider family members also helps children build their resilience. But resilience doesn't look the same for everyone and each child will have their own strengths, skills and ways of coping; here are some things that you can do to help build resilience and manage the transition back to school:



Encourage strong peer relationships:

An important part of school-life is friendship building and with children having been away from their friends for a while, it's important they start rebuilding those relationships or even make new friends. A great way of doing this is for parents to arrange for their child to go on a socially distanced walk with a friend after-school or on the weekend.



Talk to them:

A lot of children have questions and worries but may find it hard expressing themselves. Start conversations with them allowing time and space to be vulnerable. Some children may have an adult they feel comfortable talking to while others they may need to build trust with someone so be the one who makes an effort to communicate. When children feel safe and loved they are more willing to open up. Also, remind them that they are valued by the wider community and that their presence makes a difference.



Praise your child:

(but don't overdo it!): Children's self-esteem may have taken a hit these past couple of months so boosting their confidence will help them feel better about themselves. Compliment your child every so often, highlighting their key skills and attributes. It's important not to go overboard though as this will be hard to keep-up with long-term.

Avoid comparing:

Every child is unique so avoid comparing your child to their siblings, family members or friends and cherish what makes them different as this will make them feel special and happy within themselves.



Be flexible:

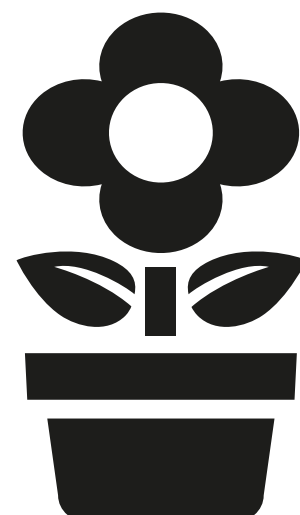
Understand that each child is different. Some have thrived while being home-schooled while others do better in the classroom. We encourage parents to send their children back to school but also realise that some children may do better spending the remainder of the school year at home. Speak to your school and make an informed decision on what best for your child.

Give them options:

Letting your child make decisions on their own will help give them a sense of identity and boost their confidence. This could be anything small such as asking what they want to have for dinner or what game they want to play. They'll also develop an understanding of responsibility, consequences and risks in different situations.

Keep them busy:

You have less time to stress when you're busy having fun, so we've provided a list of brilliant activities and challenges to keep your young ones creative, active and entertained! (pg 7)

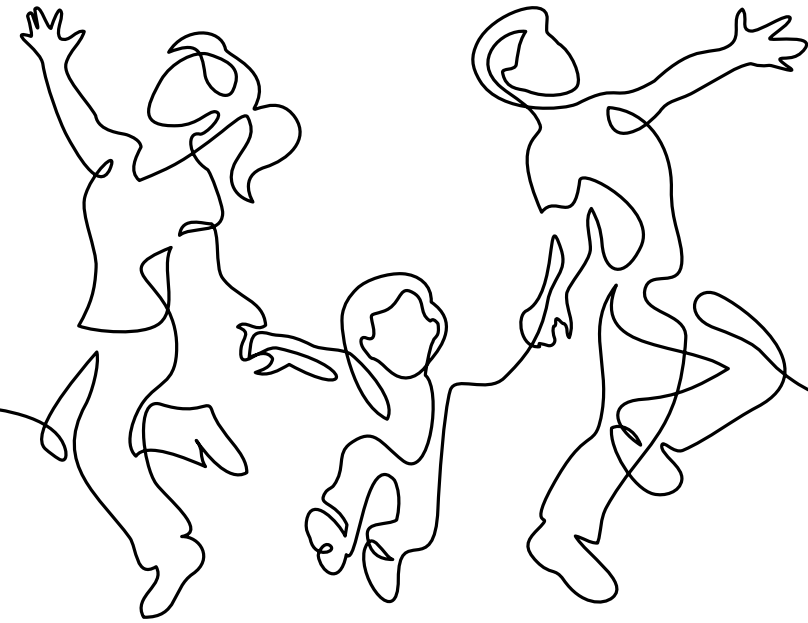


Nip in the Bud have provided a short film with clinical psychologist, Dr Jess Richardson, on how to deal with any anxiety your children may be feeling about returning to school:
<https://nipinthebud.org/information-films/tips-for-returning-to-school/>

*Gilligan (1997) and Daniel & Wassell (2002) identify six domains to a child's life that contribute to the factors known to be associated with resilience

Self-reflecting and inspiring hope

Below are some challenges and activities to help your child reflect on what's gone well during their time at home and what they can look forward to as the world gradually transitions into a new normal.



Journaling

You're never too young to start journaling! Journaling is a positive tool to express your emotions while improving your mental health and resilience. It's a great way for children to reflect on how they feel and deal with challenging situations more calmly and less reactively. Start by journaling with your child every evening, half an hour before their bedtime or whenever is most convenient for the both of you. This silent bonding time may lead them to open up to you however make sure that they only share what they've written if they're happy to.

Time Capsule

I wonder what the world will look like when this is all over? Ask your child to write a letter to their future self to read in September. What will they do when the world is back to "normal"? What are all the things they can't wait to do and the places they'd like to go and see? Put the note in a jar (you could even bury the jar in some soil in your garden if you have one!) then open the jar and get your child to read their letter back to them self in exactly three months' time. This will give them something to look forward to, encourages them to be hopeful and grateful for the simple things a lot of us took for granted prior to lockdown.



News Reporter

Get your child to present what the world looks like right now from their perspective. What's changed? What's been one highlight and one lowlight of being at home? You could get them to perform a mini presentation to their family or classmates and even record it on video (don't forget to hand them a brush or hairspray bottle, as their microphone, for a camera-ready performance!)

