Parent guidelines to support your child returning to school

Our normality has been shaken in ways that none of us could ever have been prepared for. But now we are starting a new stage, a stage of re-entering the world, with schools once again beginning to teach their pupils face to face and our children returning to the social habitat & norms that they were abruptly disconnected from. Whilst many children will be excited to return to school, many are likely to find this transition unsettling and anxiety-provoking. It's vital that the reintegration of our children into school is done in a way that maintains and protects the psychological wellbeing of our children. To this end we would appreciate it if you consider the following guidelines carefully.

1: Routines

If you have managed to have your children in some sort of routine since they have been at home, then great. If not, don't worry. Now, however is the time to implement a routine so that becoming accustomed to the school day will not be too difficult. Aim to bring bedtimes and waking up times to where they used to be for regular school days.

2: Being a role model

Children absorb the behaviour and reactions of their parents. Schools might be opening in very trying circumstances, but we need to show an encouraging approach and celebrate the reintegration of our children. If you want your child to be positive and calm about going back to school, then it's essential that you mirror these same emotions. If you are struggling with extreme anxiety, then please consider seeking professional help and take care of yourself in order to be available to meet the needs of your child.

3: Preparing children for change

Particularly during transition periods our children need our support. The more you can prepare your child about the changes he/she might expect to find on their first day back at school, the easier it will be for them to cope with a very different reality to what they have been used to in school. Although each school will have their own specific safety policies, prepare your children for the following:-

- Staggered breaks, lunch and finishing times

- Children will be in small groups at all times of the day
- Children will not be allowed to share items with each other
- Children will not be able to have physical contact or be in close proximity with children outside their group.
- Playground games will be limited

Free up some time and using age-appropriate language, explain to your child about these changes and why they are necessary. Be willing to answer their questions and listen to any of their concerns.

4: How is my child coping?

Despite the emotional challenges that children have inevitably been through in these last two months, most will have the resilience to cope without psychological intervention being necessary. However, some may have been affected to a greater degree. They may have previously struggled with anxiety or have faced particularly traumatic events more recently. It is to be expected that many children may also be troubled by health worries.

Unfortunately, children rarely tell us how they are feeling so it's up to us as parents to look out for the signs which might indicate that they are struggling. Although it would be normal to be seeing more negative emotions and behaviours from our children, here are some warning signs to look for, if present for two weeks or more, may indicate that your child requires further emotional and professional help.

- Being very afraid when away from parents
- Having extreme fear about health
- Being very afraid being in new places or around people
- Being constantly worried about the future and about bad things happening (general anxiety)
- Having repeated episodes of sudden, unexpected, intense fear that come with symptoms like heart pounding, having trouble breathing, or feeling dizzy, shaky, or sweaty
- Feeling sad, hopeless, or irritable a lot of the time
- Not wanting to do or enjoy doing fun things they used to enjoy

The key to dealing with emotional problems is to treat them as early as possible. If you are concerned about your child, then please alert the school.

5: Limit exposure to negative news

Although it is important to be open and willing to discuss the on-going situation with our children, it's also potentially damaging if we expose them to a constant barrage of disturbing news items. Furthermore, the news typically amplifies uncertainty when we want to convey a sense of clarity and consistency to our children. It is important to emphasise to children the fact that following health guidelines has reduced the prevalence of the virus, and the situation is BH much better. Try to make a conscious effort to avoid constantly discussing the on-going corona updates and deliberately begin talking about the 'normal,' even if, more trivial issues once again.

6: Patience

This is a new reality for everyone, so please be patient with your school as they seek to reintegrate your child in the safest possible way. We are all aware that the children have been learning virtually in more relaxed conditions, and are now returning to formal and more structured conditions. Patience and open communication is key for reintegration to work well.

7: Creating a calm home.

As we know from Torah and medical literature, generating a spirit of simcha and optimism in the home is key in building resilient children. Providing warmth, quality time and regular positive reinforcement to your child will make a huge difference. The more we can endeavour to make our home an oasis of calm within the chaotic world we find ourselves in, the calmer our children will feel.

8: Emotional wellbeing provision

Your school has signed up to the Lechazek wellbeing programme. This means that members of staff are being empowered to promote the children's wellbeing. Additionally, children will also have access to specifically designed wellbeing resources in order to promote their resilience in the face of potentially future adversities. Should any child be in need of individual intervention this will be discussed with parents with due sensitivity and signposted as appropriate.

For further questions and concerns please contact your school.

Bezras Hashem we look forward working collaboratively for a successful reintegration

Yaakov Barr
Psychotherapist (CBT)
Clinical Supervisor

Dr David Roth
Educational psychologist
EMDR Therapist