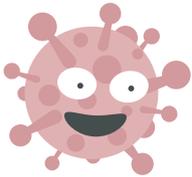


BACK TO SCHOOL

A guide to supporting
your child as they return
to school or nursery





Introduction

The last few months have been testing for us all. New rules and routines have of course been necessary and we've all had to adjust. However, we shouldn't underestimate the impact this has had on us as parents and on our children.

During lockdown we had no choice but to quickly react and change to the emerging situation and new ways of living. Now though, we are coming to terms with this 'new normal' and so can be more playful about how we support our children

In particular this is a great time to consider how we can best support our children's emotional and mental health as they prepare to start or return to nursery or school.

This guide is designed to help you with just that.

Here's what we'll be covering:



1. Discuss their feelings



2. Discuss the new routine



3. Tell them the 'Why'



4. Get into a routine at home



5. Get them excited



6. Be kind to yourself

1. Discuss their feelings

Just because our children may seem 'OK' with all of the changes and newness around them, it's still super important to create some time and space to ease out their feelings. You may have a child who does this naturally, which is wonderful. If your little one needs a little bit of prompting to talk about how they feel (which is totally normal) here are some tips to help them along the way:

Role play - sometimes children find it easier to talk about how they feel when role playing - you can use lego figures or any other characters to help here. You can set up a scene which is 'the first day back' and assign roles to different characters for a parent or carer, a teacher and a child - you could ask your child how they think each 'character' is feeling as they go into school for that first day.

A dedicated space and time - It can also help to ensure that when you are asking your child about how they feel that you are doing so when you can avoid distractions. Life is busy (!) but if you can dedicate some calm time to this conversation your child will likely open up far more than if you and they are distracted by other things.

Motion releases emotion! - If your child is reluctant to share their feelings, you might want to try going for a walk or bike ride and having the conversation as they are moving - this works wonders for some children!

Remember that the aim here is to talk about feelings that they have, not to plant worries or fears. So if they seem absolutely fine about the return don't feel the need to labour this!



2. Discuss the new routine

Often the thing that can cause a child the most worry is the fear of the unknown. So speaking to your setting or school and understanding exactly what the process will be when they return is key. Here are some of the things it is worth knowing:

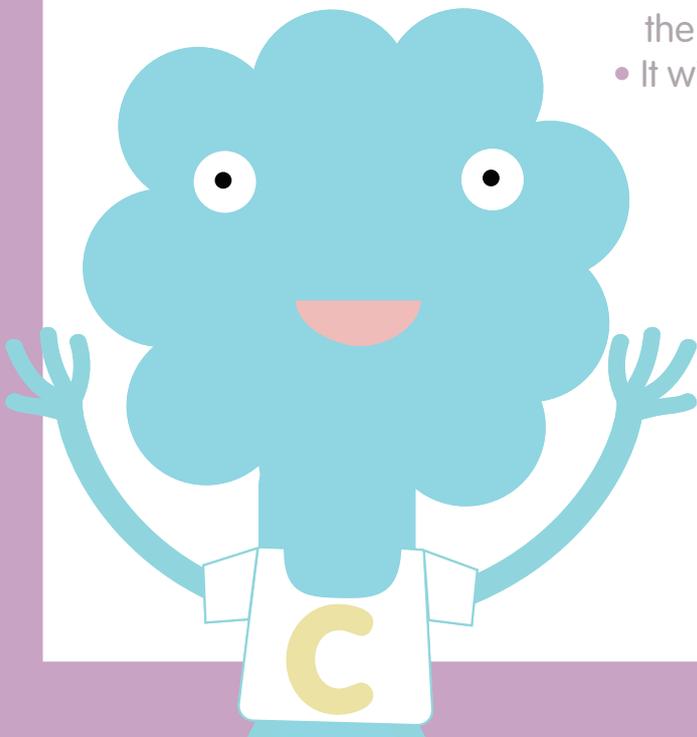
- Will all staff be wearing Personal Protective Equipment?
If so - what type?
- What will happen at play time?
- Will children need to socially distance at all times?
- What will the new drop off routine be?
- How often will they be asked to wash their hands?

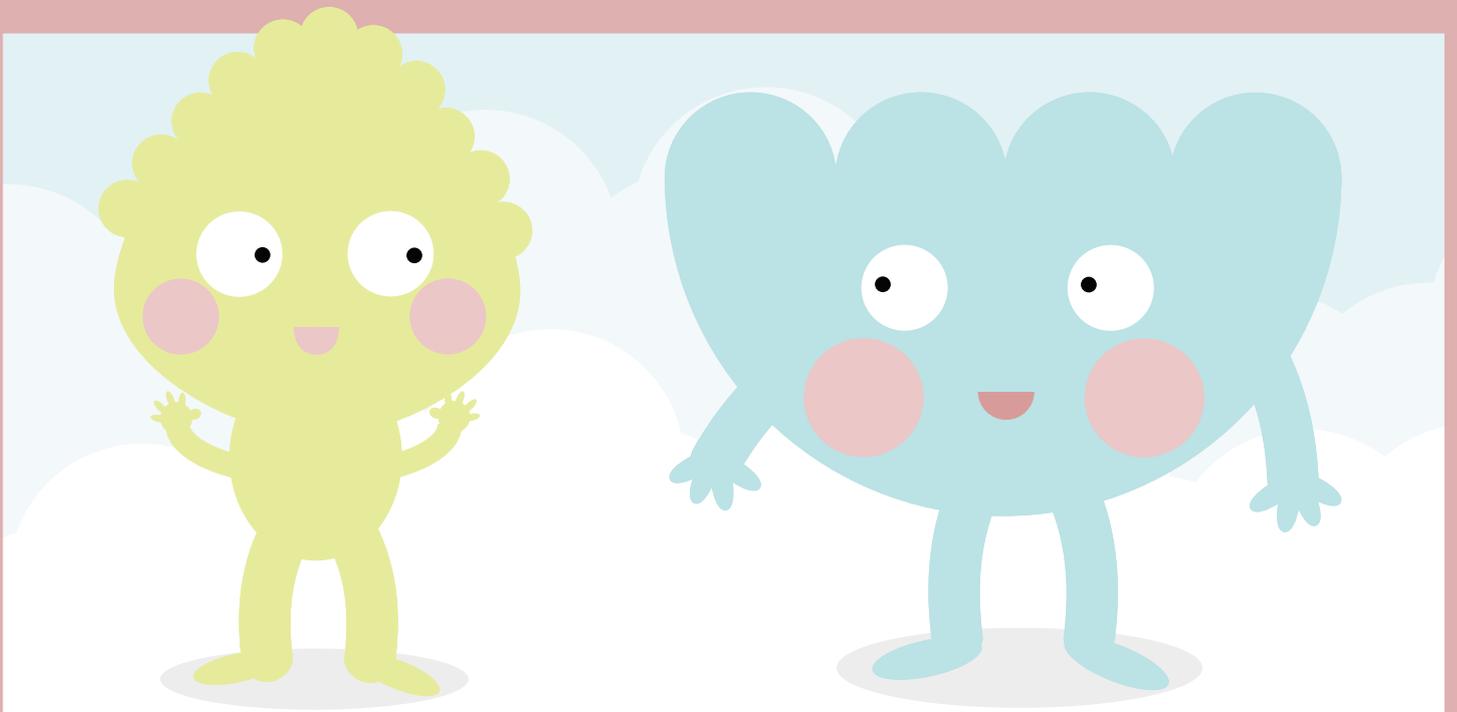
Explain things will look different - but tell your child not to worry, because the teachers have been thinking about how to make the school safe and will help you get used to the new layouts and routines.

By getting really clear on what your little one will experience and then sharing that with them you will ease so many of their worries. Again, you can use role play here to really support them in understanding what this will be like.

Balance helping them to understand what might be different with reminding them what will be the same! Understanding that lots will be as it always has been can really help ease their worries and concerns. For example:

- They'll see the same adults around school.
- They'll be wearing the same uniform.
- You'll still be taking them in and it will be the same journey.
- It will be the same food at lunchtime.





3. Tell them the 'Why'

It can be really easy to get so focused on the WHAT will be different and WHAT your child has to do that we can forget to explain the WHY!

Helping your child to understand exactly WHY things are different and WHY we all have to follow certain rules is a really important part of helping them to adjust.

Explaining what Coronavirus is and why we need to protect ourselves by keeping distance etc can really help your child to understand and so comply with the new rules. Our free guide (which includes a fun experiment!) may help you. You can get a copy here:

<https://myhappymind.kartra.com/page/Coronavirus>

By talking to your little one about how they can stay safe at school for example by washing their hands before and after eating, you are reassuring them that the school or nursery are totally focused on their safety.

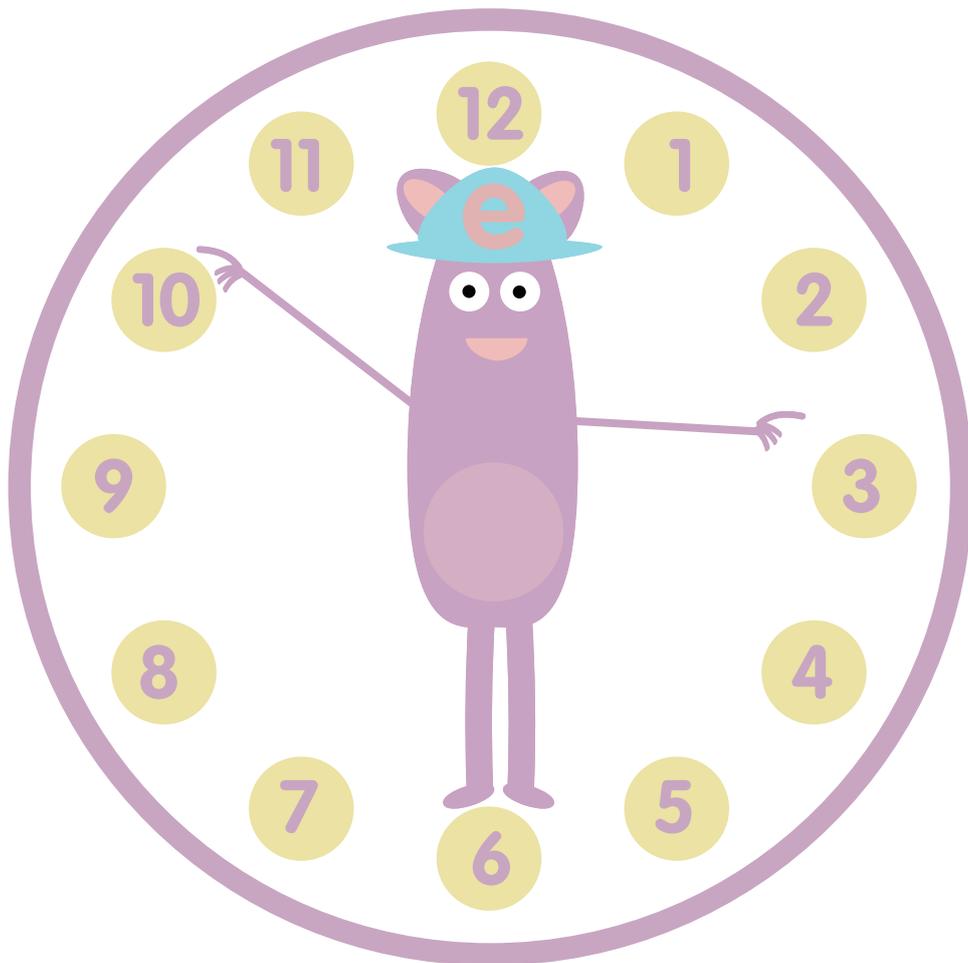
Of course we don't want to worry them here, but it is important that they understand why things are different and why we are all putting in place the precautions that we are.

4. Get into a routine at home

For some of our children it has been a long time since they've been in a routine at nursery or school. While we have all enjoyed some of the freedom and flexibility this has brought with it, we do want to ensure that they are ready to get back into a routine once they return.

As well as reminding them of this, it is useful to start to transition them into some sort of routine at home over the coming weeks so that it doesn't come as a shock when they return to school or nursery.

Simple things like eating breakfast and lunch at the same time or introducing structured 'play time' and 'relax time' can be a good start here. As you put these things in place you can remind your little one that this is just like nursery/school, so you are drawing the parallel for them which will help prepare them to go back.





5. Get them excited

As well as preparing your child for the 'new normal' it is important to balance this with getting them excited about going back to school or nursery. Here are some different ways you can do this:

Ask them what they are most excited about doing when they return
Spend some time remembering their favourite memories of school/nursery before lockdown.

Talk to them about your favourite memories of this stage and what you loved doing.

Ensuring you are helping them to feel excited and positive about returning will really help with any feelings of worry that they may have too.

6. Be kind to yourself

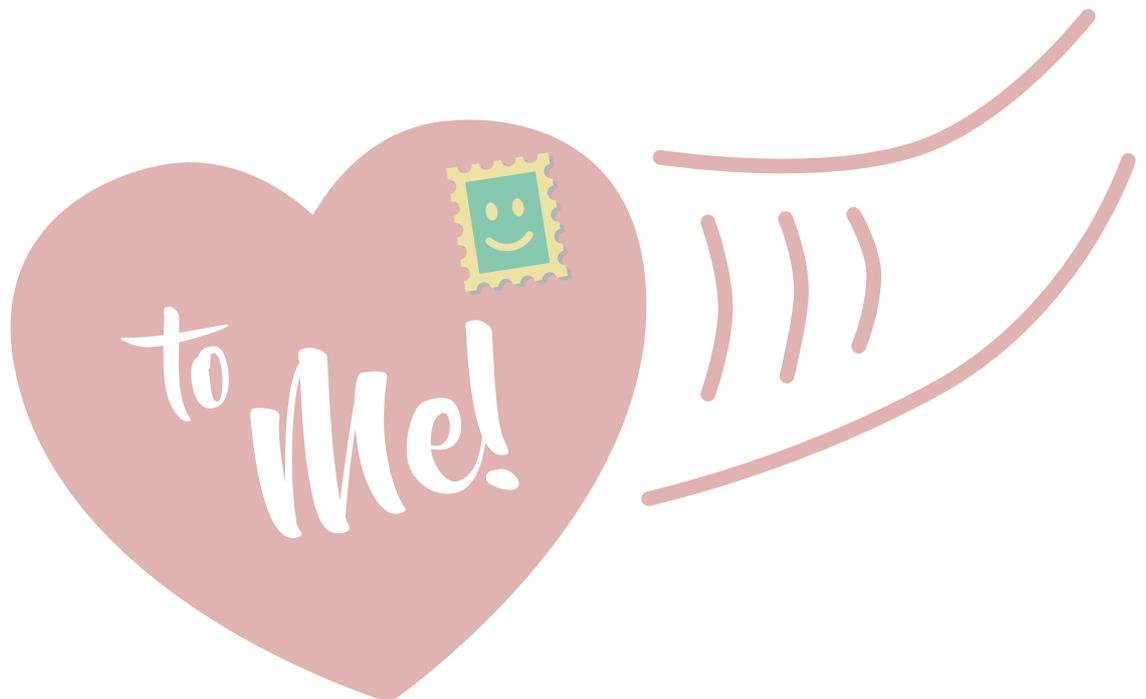
We have all been through a rollercoaster of emotions as parents and carers over the last few months. Whether that has been job uncertainty, health concerns or just the feelings of fear and worry that this pandemic has brought.

Returning to some 'new normal' therefore will come with a variety of emotions for us all. Maybe you're not sure about sending your little one back? Maybe you are looking forward to getting some routine back?

Wherever you may be it is important to talk about your emotions with a partner or friend too. The thing to remember is that however you are feeling - it is OK. There is no such thing as 'right' or 'wrong' feelings when it comes to your little one returning to school or nursery. Acknowledging that and taking the time to look after yourself is super important.

Self care is healthcare! Looking after you and taking time for you is not selfish - it is critical to enable you to be the awesome parent or carer that you are.

Children pick up on lots of little clues about how we as parents or carers are feeling - and they use this information to inform how they should be feeling. If we look worried, they pick up on this and start worrying too!



Don't forget that checklist!



1. Discuss their feelings



2. Discuss the new routine



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We help Primary Schools, Nurseries, and families to create a positive mental wellbeing culture in which children build resilience, self-esteem, and character.

Our programs leverage the latest research, science, and technology to help children develop lifelong habits and learn to thrive.

