

Dear parents,

We hope you have had a lovely summer break. As the holidays come to an end, many parents and children may have worries and anxieties about going to school.

Here are some helpful tips to support the return to school.

1. It is natural to have anxieties and worries and often these are spoken about with friends and relatives. Often friends and relatives may ask about starting school. Talking makes us feel better, but anxious tones, emotions of love mixed with fears can be confusing for children. Children pick up the anxiety vibes even if they are not sure what it is all about.

Try not to talk about your worries, in front of the child or in their hearing.

2. Children may be anxious too and asking questions. It is important not to ignore concerns but to keep positive and reassuring. A positive attitude, gentle enthusiasm about how interesting school will be and a smiley face can help your child. This will also be incredibly important on Day 1!
3. Try driving/walking past the school. This is not set up as a big event, simply a way to make the route to school familiar. As you pass the school say "there is your school" then just continue with your journey.
4. Talk about the routine to offer reassurance – using visuals even for a verbal child can help. (see attached visual)

Many routines for the children and parents are different during the break, with children able to have a relaxed start to the morning, more time using electronics, and snack at hand. Some children can struggle with this not being the case when they return to school. The first day of the term can be a shock to the system for everyone!

5. Practice getting up early and follow the anticipated breakfast and dressing routine for a few days before the start of school.
6. Decrease the use of technology over the next few days and have a set time when children can use technology and for a set amount of time, for example at 12pm and 4pm. the iPad can be used for 30 minutes.
7. Have snacks and lunch at set times. (In school the children will have a healthy mid-morning and mid-afternoon snack, Lunch is either 11.45, 12 or 12.30)

Eating can be an issue for lots of the children and some can be very particular about what they eat. Children are more likely to be cheerful and manage in the afternoon if they have eaten a lunch. Ensure your class teacher is informed if your child has specific preferences around food. It would be helpful to include a variety of food options including savoury foods, a pudding, fruit and vegetables. If your child is particularly reluctant to eat, you can put several items in the box so the children can choose between them.

8. If your child is having a packed lunch or dinner with a backup packed lunch (in case they don't eat the dinner) practice having lunch from the lunch box.
9. Ensure the lunch box has a photo of your child on it on a luggage label or if they can read their name written in large letters on it, so they can clearly identify their lunch box.
10. Use clear containers so the children can clearly identify what food is in them. (Encourage child to eat savoury foods first, followed by sweet foods. )
11. Practice learning to open containers and pack everything back into the box when they have finished.
12. Practice putting empty packaging into the bin.

New clothes and shoes can feel uncomfortable for some children.

13. Try getting shoes broken in by encouraging your child to wear them for short periods of time.
14. Remove labels if your child finds these uncomfortable and sew / stick name labels on the outside.

15. Give the uniform a wash before the first day back – if it smells familiar, this might make it easier for your child.

Finally, when your child gets home, you are likely to have a million questions, how did it go? Who did you play with? What did you eat for lunch? Etc. At the end of the day your child will be tired, they may have used up every bit of tolerance and brain space managing all the new things. This is especially the case for children with ASD as processing so many new things, who does what and working out how it all fits together needs concentration and effort. It doesn't mean they haven't enjoyed it, it just means they need time, space, a snack and a drink!

16. Try to resist asking questions, greet your child and be pleased to see them and be quiet, let them unwind, give them space and time. The news of school is much more likely to come better if you can leave it for a bit. This is incredibly hard when it's all parents have been thinking about all day!

17. Another strategy to talk to your child about their day is to comment rather than ask direct questions after they have time and space. For example saying "Today I went shopping and cleaned the bedrooms, Daddy went to work and ... went to school" Then pausing to see if your child says anything about their day. (Don't expect it to happen the first few times!)

18. Remember the hand rule to avoid overwhelming your child with questions, thumb = question and then fingers = comments. So for every question you ask you have to then make 4 comments before you can ask another question!

We look forward to welcoming you back in September and hope you have an enjoyable rest of the break.