



CAREGIVERS' GUIDE TO SETTING THE STAGE FOR RETURN TO SCHOOL

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INTRODUCTION

In this guide, compiled by WRDSB Psychological Services, you'll find resources to help parents and caregivers support and communicate with their children in ways that help them feel calm and secure as they return to school. While some of these suggestions will be particularly helpful in setting the stage for the "return-to-school" phase, they also reflect strategies that can be helpful on an ongoing basis. For example, parents will find information about the cycle of anxiety and school avoidance, as well as how the words we use may lower or increase anxiety. [View this guide online.](#)

Setting the Stage for Return to School

Setting the tone

In the best of times, returning to school after the summer break can be hard. In light of the extended school closure, the return to school in the fall might pose a few more challenges. Caregivers and children may have many questions, thoughts and mixed feelings about the idea of returning to school.

Finding the way forward together involves setting a calm tone of optimism and adaptability.

Helpful Information and Suggestions

Psychological Services staff have put together some ideas and suggestions to guide parents as they think about the return to school, how to talk to their children about it, and how to support their children to return.

Time to change the message

As families prepare for the return to school, it is a good time to rethink and change the messages we give children. The words we use can be an important ingredient in helping children feel calm and secure.

Managing the "alarm system"

Changing the message may also help when it comes to managing the natural "alarm system" all humans have, which alerts us to possible danger. Moving toward the use of "Calm Language" and away from the language of fear and safety will benefit children.

When adults feel prepared and can communicate calmly and with confidence, they can help children feel calm and secure.

Guiding Questions

The extended school closure has been a new experience for everyone. Naturally, parents will have questions about how children will adapt to being back at school.

How we frame questions sets the tone for the approach adults will take, the strategies they will use, and the confidence parents will feel when releasing their children's care to educators at school. Deborah MacNamara, psychologist, helped to re-frame some important questions in her video, "[Leading Our Kids Back to School](#)."

We have summarized some of her guiding questions and suggestions for you in this resource.

- Will our kids feel secure?
- What can I do if my child feels nervous?
- What will children need to help them adapt?
- What conditions are needed to support learning?

Helping children face something scary

Even at the best of times, some children have more trouble than other children when it comes to going to school. This resource includes information that will help parents and caregivers understand more about the nature of anxiety and the problem with avoiding scary things.

Caregivers and educators together

We want caregivers to know that they are not alone when it comes to helping children with the return to school. When needed, educators and school board staff members from psychology and social work may connect with caregivers and parents to help children overcome fears about things such as going to school.

LEADING OUR KIDS BACK TO SCHOOL

Setting a Positive Tone for the Return to School

While many things will be the same about returning to school, some things will also be different this year.

In her video, "[Leading Our Kids Back to School](#)", Psychologist Deborah MacNamara considered questions parents might naturally have and then stated them in different terms to help adults lead with confidence and positivity.

Will our kids feel secure?

Rather than asking, "Will our kids feel safe", it would be more helpful to ask if children will feel secure. "Why is that?", you might ask. We cannot know the future or predict what is going to happen, which makes it hard to promise or tell children they will be safe.

As Dr. MacNamara reminds us, "Safety is an illusion," because we cannot predict what is going to happen and cannot know the future. Instead, it is better to focus on helping children feel secure in the face of uncertainty, which they can do when adults take the lead and model a calm, thoughtful approach to difficult situations.

Positive adult relationships help children feel secure

- Parents do not need to have all the answers, they just have to be ready to respond to their child's questions and needs. Parents and caregivers are natural caretakers, so you've got this!
- Instead of telling children they will be okay, tell them they will be taken care of. Why?
 - Being "okay" is different for every person - children who are nervous or anxious will find many ways to argue that they will not be okay
- Logic often will not solve the worry, but it is harder for kids to argue the point that someone will take care of them
- Parents can point their children toward the "caregivers" at school with positive messages like these: "These are the people I have chosen to take care of you", "Your teacher is looking forward to seeing you", "Your teacher will take care of you"
- Lead with confidence - meet children's needs, not their demands.
 - Children need support and encouragement, but sometimes the things they say and do come across as demands that adults think they need to respond to.
 - For example, your child might cry and say they are **not** going to school. What they need is for you to take the lead by telling them you believe in them and that they will be able to handle what they have to do.

- When children are upset and making demands, it is hard for parents to keep from asking their child a lot of questions, like, "Are you scared?", but it is important for adults to stop themselves from doing it
- Even if parents and caregivers have their own doubts, they should express their concerns to or lean on other adults, while giving positive, supportive messages to their children
- Before and after school, listen with full attention and have some fun (be playful!) - these things deepen your connection with your child

What can I do if my child feels nervous about going back to school?

Instead of asking, "Will the return to school cause anxiety?", it would be more helpful to ask, "What can be done if my child feels nervous or anxious?" Remember, your connection with your child is like a "force field" around your child's heart - remind your children that you are always thinking of them when you are apart.

Suggestions:

- You can ask your child to imagine that there is an invisible string between them and you, which does not break when you are apart.
- Food is often a sign of home and comfort. In the first days of school, you might want to put a favourite item in your child's lunch as a reminder of your connection.

Other signs of comfort

Children may not be able to take comfort items like a favourite toy to school.

Instead:

- you could put a small picture in your child's lunch bag, which they will see at lunch or snack times
 - for example, send a small picture of family, the family pet or a favourite toy
- you could also put in a little note to your child to let them know you hope the day is going well

Make room for and accept feelings

- accept the feelings your child has, no matter how silly they seem
- reassure children their feelings are not a problem, that they are normal, and they are to be expected
- make room for children's feelings rather than trying to get rid of them, e.g., by constantly comforting or reassuring them
- remember - tears are okay - crying is the body's way of releasing tension

Accepting feelings also means holding back from:

- judging
 - e.g., “why would you feel like that?”
- dismissing
 - e.g., “you don’t really feel like that”
- countering
 - e.g., “I think you’re just excited”
- defending yourself
 - e.g., I have to go to work, so you have to go to school
- teaching a lesson
 - e.g., you have to learn how to handle this
- solving your child's problem
 - e.g., getting them out of an uncomfortable situation

In the days/weeks before school starts, drive or walk by the school and simply state, in a matter-of-fact tone, “There it is!” On purpose, change the message from “time to stay home” to “now it’s time to go to school.”

Be confident in your decision about returning to school and hold back from making judgements about decisions other families make, e.g., "This is the right decision for our family, but other families might have different factors to consider. "

What will children need to adapt?

Psychologist Deborah MacNamara, reminds us about the natural ability of children to adjust to changes in life. When parents asked, "How will our kids adapt to all the changes at school?", she suggested a different question focused on what they need in order to make the adjustment. It helps focus adults on the things they can do to help children adjust.

First and foremost, kids need connections with adults who calmly take the lead.

Help children face reality

Help children face the reality about the way things have to be and what cannot be changed "for now" so they can move on. This can be done by letting children express their stories, feelings and frustrations.

For example, consider the following situation:

Child: "I was so mad we couldn't play tag at school today because we are not allowed to touch other people."

Parent: "That must have been frustrating. I know how much you love tag, but that's the way it has to be right now."

Draw on your relationship with your child to help them set good intentions for the day

Ask your child: "Can I count on you to:

- follow the handwashing routines at school?"
- keep distance between you and your friends at recess?"
- ask your teacher for help if you feel upset about the new rules?"

Think about using play to teach kids new rules and routines. Using playful approaches to learn new ways of doing things will be less alarming and much less likely to result in resistance. Not to mention, having fun and laughing helps to release tension!

What conditions are needed to support children's learning?

Families may naturally wonder, "Will our kids learn once they get back to school?" It would be more helpful to ask, "What conditions are needed to support children's learning?"

Make connections first

A sense of connection is the foundation for everything, including learning. After this time of staying-at-home, everyone is learning how much we mean to each other. The key to survival and doing well is leaning into our relationships. Taking time to reconnect and to kickstart relationships between teachers and classmates first will set the stage for getting on with learning later.

Caring adults at home and at school need to let children know that they are there to help, whether that is knowing where to put personal belongings, managing excited feelings about seeing friends they have not seen for a long time, or remembering how to do arithmetic.

Play and have a sense of humour

Practicing new rules and routines in playful ways will help children get comfortable doing things in new ways. Play is good at all ages - for children, teens, and adults! Having a sense of humour and sharing laughter helps to reduce tension.

Returning to "normal" activities feels right

For children, going to school and doing schoolwork may actually help them feel better because they are familiar and “normal” activities. Caregivers can remind kids that learning new things and doing schoolwork is something they already know how to do!

Many thanks to Deborah MacNamara for her video session, “[Leading Our Kids Back to School.](#)” Notes, edits and additions made by WRDSB Psychological Services Staff.

SETTING THE STAGE: CALM LANGUAGE

Help Children Feel Confident and Secure Through the Use of Calm Language

As we think about the idea of returning to school, we know many strategies will be needed to help set a calm tone, for children as well as adults. One way this can be done is to be mindful of the words we use. In fact, this is a good time to rethink the use of "safety" language and the messages it sends to children, as well as the adults in their lives.

Humans have a built-in "alarm system" that alerts them to possible harm or danger. This warning system helps people know when to take action to reduce harm or get to safety.

However, sometimes the alarm system gets switched on when it is not needed or when it is actually unhelpful.

The words or phrases we use can help to keep the alarm quiet or at least turned down. However, the opposite is also true: they can turn on the alarm. Adults feel very responsible for children's safety, but sometimes that leads them to use words that may make children nervous. They may also remind children about safety more often than is needed.

Individual children differ in terms of how well they tolerate feelings of fear and anxiety and how quickly they can turn off the “alarm” and return to feeling calm. Children who are more sensitive or anxious may have more sensitive "alarms", may be more sensitive to the impact of safety talk, and may experience inflated feelings of worry more easily. In turn they may have more trouble returning to calm. After the past few months, it makes sense to do things to keep from setting off children's alarms when possible. Besides, at any time, it is more helpful to give children clear messages about what we want them to do without burying instructions in the language of fear and safety.

How can I adjust my language to set a calm tone and to avoid inflating fear?

Match language to what is needed and try not to turn on the "alarm" system:

- There have been many "safety" messages while staying at home
- The need to be watchful about physical distance and hygiene habits, like hand-washing, has created tension for many people
- Frequently hearing the saying, "Stay Safe", has made it hard for many people to keep their "alarm" system turned down or off
- Try using messages like these with your children and others: "Be Healthy", "Stay Well", "Keep Your Distance", or "Stay Apart"
- These messages get the point across and show you care, but they are less likely to turn on a child's alarm system, or yours!

Refer to "health precautions"

- Using the term "health precautions" rather than safety measures speaks directly to the "good health" measures that Public Health officials have been recommending
- By now, children will be pretty used to these measures and why they need to follow them
- Parents can remind children that educators have made plans for following these routines at school, just like you have done at home
 - e.g., "Your teacher will remind you to wash your hands"

Optimism: Give messages of strength and hope

- Give children positive messages about how well they coped with the stay-at-home time
- Remind children that they came through that time in spite of hard things they had to deal with, earning a badge of honour for a job well done
 - e.g., "Even though it was hard not to see your friends, you made it through!"
- Parents and caregivers can help their children realize they are wiser and more prepared to handle new challenges with those experiences in their "life backpack"
 - e.g., "You have done something you never had to do before - that will help you handle other new things."
- Parents and caregivers can also remind children that they have had to learn and practice new procedures at school in the past and will be able to learn new routines at school this year

Self-Check: Whose worry is it anyway?

- Parents and caregivers have lots of reasons to be concerned for their children with the return to school
- The challenge for adults will be to keep feelings of concern in check so that they can help their children feel secure in the care of the adults at school

- It is important for parents and caregivers to be aware of their own feelings of worry or tendency to be overprotective, partly so that they can tune into “signals” they might be giving their children without meaning to
- Keep in mind - children pick up on other people's feelings and sometimes start to feel the same way
- Even if parents and caregivers are worried, they can confidently give encouraging messages like, "I know the adults at school will take care of you", "Have a good day”

Beyond these unusual times surrounding return to school, many of the suggestions, including those below, will generally help parents set the tone for helping children to move forward calmly in the things they do.

Families are clearly responsible for children's safety and well-being. In fact, it is important to teach children to think about and be aware of things that pose a risk of harm to their health and well-being. For example, think about the lessons you teach young children about the "hot stove" or running out into the street.

Less "safety talk"

- Once children have learned those important "safety" lessons, parents no longer have to keep referring to safety in those situations
- Instead, parents may need to give reminders
- Reminders should tell children what they need to "do" rather than describing actions as safe or "unsafe"

In fact, when older children already know the "rules" and reasons for doing things, too much talk about the reasons or safety risks might become like "static" that children learn to ignore. Instead, parents can help children tap into their "safety" knowledge by asking them questions like, "What do you need to remember when you are playing at the park?"

Make feedback specific

Avoid burying instructions or feedback to children in "safety talk." Raising the "shadow" of safety may lead some children to have unhelpful feelings, like nervousness, that actually get in the way of their ability to manage their behaviour.

When children make a misstep like not following house rules, tell them what they **should do** (e.g., Walk down the stairs) rather than telling them what they should not do and using safety talk (e.g., That's not safe, don't run down the stairs.)

In the end, when a child follows the specific instruction, the risk of harm or misfortune is naturally reduced.

Help children tune into their own signals

When adults are looking out for children, sometimes they use cautious phrases too often. Children who have sensitive temperaments or who feel hesitant in new situations may be more affected by messages of caution. Over time, they may come to avoid even trying new things or taking reasonable risks, which limits their chances to become more confident and independent.

- try to limit use of cautious phrases like "be careful" - they give little helpful information, but may add to feelings of anxiety
- when adults keep asking children if they are okay when they have said they are, children may question their ability to take stock of situations

It is important to help children develop their ability to listen to their own internal signals. To do this, ask children to think about the answers to questions like, "What do you think about this?" or "How do you feel about this situation?"

Don't cry wolf

Too much safety talk may cause children/teens to ignore it altogether, which is a problem when we need to let them know about something that poses a serious risk or potential harm. The more someone raises the alarm in the absence of a real risk or threat, the more likely the alarm will be ignored in the presence of real threat or danger. Do your best not to label actions as dangerous or "unsafe" when they actually pose little risk to your child. When adults over state the degree of danger or risk in a situation, it also lessens adults' credibility.

What do you notice?

It may be helpful for adults to notice how they react to phrases that bring thoughts of safety to mind. This self-awareness can help them tune in to children's experiences.

For example, when you read a headline like, "Watch this terrifying video of a bear breaking in", what do you notice? Do your muscles tense? Does your breathing get faster? Does your stomach tighten?

These reactions show the power of words to affect us in an instant. You might not even notice that these reactions happened, but your mind does and as you go about your day, they might affect what you do, feel or think.

Now, imagine how your child might react when they hear certain words, their "alarm" signal might get turned on and anxious feelings might affect how they behave, all without realizing it. Being mindful of the language of fear and safety is important.

SCHOOL AVOIDANCE: THE CYCLE OF ANXIETY

Scenario A

Student A has been home with their family for the last few months. They enjoyed spending time with them. They played games, went for walks, and watched movies together. Now it is time to go back to school. The student worries about leaving their family. Their heart races and the student thinks something might happen to their family.

Scenario B

Student B has also been home from school for a few months. Schools closed to help them stay away from the virus. Now, even though the virus is still around, the student is told that it is time to go back to school. They are worried they might get sick when they go back to school, so they want to stay home.

School avoidance

School avoidance occurs when a child is reluctant to attend school. Another way school avoidance shows up is when a child has difficulty staying in the classroom for the whole class or the whole day. The students in scenario A and scenario B are struggling to return to school because of worries and anxious thoughts.

The cycle of anxiety

The first response to anxious feelings is to reduce them, which often occurs by avoiding what is causing the anxious thoughts and feelings. While avoidance provides relief in the short term, it often increases anxiety in the long term. By avoiding the event, the child hides or ignores the emotions, increasing the feelings of distress associated with the event. The child learns that they can not handle the event so they continue to feel anxious every time the event occurs. The anxiety can even become stronger.

Students A and B both feel anxious about going to school. They feel relief from this anxiety if they stay at home. This strengthens the belief that leaving their family or going to school is scary and should be avoided. The next time they think about school, the anxious feelings come back. This becomes a cycle that will keep increasing the level of anxiety they feel over time. Both students will struggle and have a difficult time going to school.

Good news: with help, children can turn around the cycle

Rather than avoiding, children need to learn strategies that will help them cope with their thoughts and feelings. With the support of parents and teachers, they can learn about their anxious thoughts, their fears, and how to manage them. They can also learn strategies that will help them gradually overcome their worries and fears.

Children can gradually change their behaviour (ie., school avoidance) by facing their fears in a step-by-step manner. They can start with situations that are easier to handle and then work their way to more challenging steps or situations.

There are several important steps to consider when developing a plan to tackle the anxiety cycle.

Step One: Identify the goal

In the case of school avoidance, the goal is to attend school.

Step Two: Accept the child's feelings

Let the child know that it is normal to have worries. For example, many children worry about leaving their parents. In the current situation, both children and adults have been worried about the Covid virus. Help children to talk about their different feelings and how their body feels (e.g., tense muscles, butterflies in the stomach, etc.).

Step Three: Teach the child different types of coping strategies

Research has shown that a number of coping strategies are useful when coping with anxiety. Helpful strategies include breathing exercises, relaxation techniques, and positive thinking. It is important to teach the strategies to children when they are calm so that they know how to use them when they are feeling upset. Practice, practice, practice. Practicing using these coping strategies makes it easier to use them when they are needed.

Step Four: Make a list of steps to take to reach the goal

Start by creating a list of all the different steps it would take to make it to school. Break down the goal into individual tasks. Identify the amount of distress each task creates. Arrange the tasks from the least to the greatest distress. Similar to walking up a ladder, the first step is the task with the least distress. The second step is the task with more distress. Slowly go up the ladder, until you reach the top, the goal. At each step practice relaxation techniques and positive thinking.

Student A may need to start with spending time apart from their immediate family. They may need to spend more time with other members of their family or with family friends. Then, they may need to

leave the house for short periods of time. They could go to a nearby friend's place or go with a family friend or extended family member to a store that is farther away. Gradually, Student A goes farther from home for longer periods of time.

Student B may need to start by talking with their parents about good health practices. Then they may need to talk with their teacher who can reassure them that these health practices will also be part of the school routines. With the support of the school staff, they could visit the school before the students return to school to see what hygiene procedures have been put in place.

Step Five: Use the coping strategies while working through each step

Help the child use coping strategies selected for each step outlined in Step 4. Different strategies or a combination of strategies may be needed at each step. Praise the child's success for using strategies, for trying, and for mastering each step. If the child struggles with one of the steps along the way, check to see if they have the strategies they need or if they need to work on an earlier step for longer before moving to the next step.

By working through the anxious feelings, the students can break the cycle of avoidance. The use of the coping strategies helps reduce anxiety to a level a child can manage. They learn that they can handle each situation and get better at believing in their ability to control their responses. This will help them approach future events confidently and they are able to go to school.

HELPING CHILDREN MANAGE THEIR FEELINGS

The onset of a new school year can trigger many different emotions: worry, anger, sadness, excitement. Children will need time, space, guidance and support to recognize, identify and manage their feelings. Back-to-school nerves are common. Nervousness comes with new opportunities and new adventures. If children are feeling nervous it is likely because they are facing new and unpredictable challenges.

Identify and label feelings

Help your child recognize, identify and label feelings. No matter how your child feels, it is healthy to put those feelings into words. It is easier for children to talk about their feelings if they know how they feel and why.

Listen to what your child has to say and help them name the feelings before trying to tame those feelings: "I feel nervous about starting school next week." If your child doesn't know why they feel a certain way, you can talk with them about it: "I feel upset, but I don't know why."

Validate feelings

Acknowledge your child's feelings as genuine and real. Rather than avoiding or running away from big emotions, sit with them together. When they know that they have been heard, your child may then find comfort as they are not alone with their uncomfortable feelings.

Reassure your child that you are trying to understand their feelings and will help them get back to a calm state. "I understand that you are worried because you don't know what might happen on the first day of school. That is okay. We can find ways to feel better about going back to school."

Keep it positive

As your children are preparing for the first day of school, keep the process as positive as possible. Encourage your child to **think** positively about school. When your child is feeling nervous or upset, it is normal for them to have unhelpful thoughts: "I don't want to go back to school! I can't go because it is too scary!"

Help your child notice and identify unhelpful thoughts. Thoughts are like traffic lights: Red thoughts are unhelpful and make us feel stressed and worried. Red thoughts stop us from moving forward and doing what we want or need to do. Green thoughts are helpful and can make us feel brave and confident. Green thoughts keep us moving forward to achieve new skills and goals. Play the traffic light game to change red thoughts into green thoughts.

For example, the following statement recognizes the scary thought, but adding the second, "green sentence, helps to move things forward: "I am scared about going to school. But I can take it one step at a time to help me feel better."

Explain to your children that we can practice taking charge of our own thoughts by playing the traffic light game. Give examples of thought statements and practice identifying red thoughts and changing them into green thoughts. For example, "I'm not getting any better at this!" can be changed to "I will get better at this if I give it another try."

Mindfulness, breathing and muscle relaxation

Although we all feel nervous sometimes, we can find clever ways to keep a calm state of mind and body. Practicing mindfulness, breathing and relaxation strategies will result in familiarity and mastery. When faced with big emotions, children can then access their new skills to help them return to a calm state.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness helps us to stay in the present moment rather than worrying about what might happen next. Grounding is a way to focus on the here and now by observing things in our environment while using our five senses. Ask your child to turn on their spidey-senses just like Spiderman uses his sense of sight, smell, hearing and touch to keep tabs on the world around him. Ask your child to notice five things they see around them, four things they can touch, three things they can hear, two things they can smell, and one thing they can taste.

Deep breathing strategies

Slow, deep breathing can help us relax and manage the anxiety caused by stressful events. With deep breathing, we can calm our bodies and clear our minds to help us prepare for the task ahead:

- Imagine breathing in deeply to smell a flower and breathe out to blow out candles on a birthday cake.
- Imagine a batch of cookies coming out of the oven. As you breathe in, smell those yummy cookies! But they're hot, so blow on them to cool them down.
- Imagine a calm colour as you breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.

Muscle relaxation

When feeling worried, our bodies may respond with tense muscles. With practice, children can learn the difference between stressed and relaxed muscles. At the first sign of muscle tension and worried feelings, your child can then work towards relaxation.

Play relaxation games such as:

- **Robot and Ragdoll Body:** After holding their body tight like a robot, have your child shake out their body like a flopsy ragdoll.
- **Rocks and Socks:** Ask your child to bring their hands into tight fists, squeezing their big emotions into rocks. Then ask your child to relax their hands into floppy socks, letting go of tension they just felt.

When coping skills and brave actions are practiced at home, children can learn to face their fears, take risks and gain confidence.

Resources:

- [Zen Den](#) at Comic Kids
- [Teen Health relaxation strategies](#)
- Calm: [Free guided meditation and breathing activities](#)
- [Mind Yeti:](#)

- Free guided mindfulness sessions and videos designed to help kids and adults calm, focus, and connect
- [Stop, Breathe, Think](#): Free mindfulness “missions” for kids

PRACTICE MAKES IT EASIER

Throughout our lives, we have often heard the saying, “Practice makes perfect”. This is also true of learning coping strategies and learning to handle our difficult emotions. This section shares different ideas or situations where coping strategies can be practiced and lead to overcoming school avoidance. Practice relaxation strategies and positive thoughts.

Practice leaving the house

If your children have been spending a lot of time at home, they may feel anxious when they are expected to leave home. Practice taking trips out of the house. Start with short trips in the neighbourhood and then gradually extend to further trips for longer periods of time. During these trips, practice relaxation techniques and positive thoughts.

- Take daily walks around the neighbourhood. Talk about the things you see. Share jokes or funny stories.
- Encourage opportunities for your child to take walks with other trusted caregivers or friends.

Practice separation from family and caregivers

Children may need practice separating from caregivers. Try to find opportunities to leave your child with a familiar adult for brief periods of time and/or short distances at first. As your child gets used to a separation routine, you can gradually leave for longer periods of time.

- Develop a quick “goodbye” ritual. Rituals are reassuring and can be as simple as a special wave through the window or a goodbye kiss.
- Leave without fanfare. Tell your child that you are leaving and that you will return, then go. Linger can make it more difficult for the child.
- Start by leaving for short periods of time. Gradually increase the time you are gone.
- Follow through on promises. Return at the time you promised so your child can develop the confidence that they can count on you and can handle the separation.
- Create a storybook about times in your child’s life where departures and returns are normal. Reunions can be shown to be joyful celebrations.
- Playing games such as Hide-and-Seek gives the young child opportunities for separation practice and the experience of being found over and over again no matter what. Remind your child that “I will always come and find you a million times!”
- Play with your child, acting out successful separations and reunions with toys.

- Reverse roles and have your child be “in charge” and pretend to leave *you* at home or school.
- Reading books together about spending time away from parents may help children better understand what to expect with such a separation. Visit the library, asking the librarian for suggestions of books about children separating from their parents.
 - [View suggestions for books here](#)
- Continually praise your children for their confidence and courage.

Practice going to school

Many children will share their worries about returning to school this fall. When this comes up, talk with your child about school. Look back on and talk about the parts of school that they have enjoyed. Reassure them that the adults in the schools are preparing the classrooms to follow health precautions.

Throughout the summer

- Look at pictures of the school while in the comfort of your home. Talk about how enjoyable school was before the school closure.
- Create artwork with your child by drawing pictures of the school, classrooms, and gym. Build joyful scenes of your child playing at school.
- Plan frequent, short trips to the schoolyard.
 - Talk about what your child might see from the classroom window, new games they might learn, and fun things they might do in class.
 - Look for landmarks around the school grounds (e.g., maple tree, basketball hoop) and give them silly names.
- Create a special transition photo book of the routines involved in going to school (ie., waking up, eating breakfast, travelling to school). End the book by arriving at the school building, waving good-bye.

During the week prior to school opening

- In the current circumstances, contact the school principal to see if it would be possible to arrange a virtual meeting between the teacher and your child or to visit your child's classroom if that seems necessary.
- Help your child think of something special to show their teacher when they return to school.

During the morning of a school day

- Remind your child of the fun things that can happen at school.

- **Leave an encouraging note in their lunch box. You could place a personal picture in the lunch box for them to look at during snack time.**
- **Talk about an activity you can do with your child once they return from school in the afternoon.**

As you and your child think about returning to school, continue to practice the relaxation techniques and positive statements mentioned in the previous section. Remember, your child will take their lead from you. Be calm and confident. Show that this is a normal situation and that you expect they can manage it.

If your child continues to experience significant worries about leaving you or going to school, contact your school principal. The principal may refer to the school's resource professionals (ie., Psychological Services Consultants, Social Workers) for additional support and help.