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# Counsellor's top tips

## How can I support my child going back to school during COVID-19?

**Talk about the situation in an age appropriate way, considering your child's maturity level, with a calm and empathic approach.**

Each child will have a different understanding and feelings regarding these challenging times, so it is important to let them talk and share not only their questions, but also what they think/feel. Acknowledge and validate their feelings and create a safe space that will encourage them to talk about their thoughts and emotions. Reinforce that all different feelings are ok, that they are part of the process and it's possible to deal with them.



It's important to understand:

- **Why** are they feeling a certain way?
- **What** caused that feeling?
- **How** can they overcome that feeling?

Some statements could help them feel understood, such as:

"I can understand why you feel (name the feeling) about returning to school, especially when there are so many changes happening because of COVID-19."

"From what I understand, I feel that you are quite (name the feeling) about going back to school. Do you agree?"

### **Practice positive thinking in regards to returning to school.**

Being able to see their teachers and friends and learning new things is amazing! It is important to reinforce a sense of community and positive relationships with others, as well as to model calm and confident attitudes about returning to school.

- Before school starts, ask questions like: "What makes you excited about going back to school?"; "What do you miss the most?"
- When school starts, you can ask: "What was the best part of your day?"; "What were the three things you most enjoyed about school today?"

As a parent, it is normal to feel uncertain, worried or insecure about this next phase in your children's life, but your children are amazing observers and are permeable to all those emotions inside of you. Take care of yourself as well, not only as a parent, but also as a women or as a man. Self-care is extremely important so you're able to show your child that things will be fine and that he/she can learn how to cope will all the emotions inside him/her. Don't forget to give positive messages when saying goodbye at school, and be empathic when responding to tantrums, protests or crying.

**Have open and honest discussions about what they could expect by going back to school.**



Reassure them about the safety measures and precautions the schools will have in place to keep everyone healthy. Reinforce that they will play an essential role in keeping themselves and their community healthy, by wearing their masks, respecting social distancing and other measures that are in place. This way, children can build feelings of safety and responsibility when they're back to school.

**Continuously check in with your children to evaluate their wellbeing when school begins.**

Do some activities with your child that will allow you to check on his/her wellbeing. Below you can find some examples of activities or exercises that you can do together and reinforce your family moments at home:

- Read a book or create a story together about an emotion your child is feeling or has felt during this phase and discuss different coping strategies to overcome it;
- "Name it to tame it". At dinner time, initiate a discussion around how your day was and challenge everyone at the table to identify one emotion they felt. Share your thoughts and work together to seek for different solutions to overcome it. When you identify together a challenging emotion, don't forget that "It's ok not to be ok";
- Build a predictable daily routine (consistent times for meals, waking up and going to bed and/or doing activities together after school) to promote a sense a safety and a calm mindset in your child;
- Create a social distanced handshake for your child to do with his/her friends at school.

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*If you feel that your child would benefit from more support, don't hesitate to contact your child's teacher or RDS's wellbeing professionals, who will be there to support your child all the way through.*

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