

Helping your children navigate their feelings as they return to school during COVID-19



The coronavirus outbreak has caused major disruptions to daily life and children are feeling it too. They can see that things are not normal and school is different this fall. Here are tips to help your children navigate some of the complicated emotions they may be facing with going back to school during COVID-19.

My child is scared to go back to school. How can I help him feel at ease? Children may feel nervous or reluctant to return to school, especially if they have been learning at home for months. Be upfront and honest. Go through some of the changes they may expect at school, like needing to wear masks, wash their hands and social distance.

My child is not part of the same group as his close friends returning to school and is feeling even more isolated. Letting your kids know ahead of time that schools are staggering dates for all the kids to start will help them understand what is going on. You can also tell them that schools may need to close after they open depending on what happens in the future. It's also important to continue to remind them that learning can happen anywhere – school or home.

How can I check in to see how my child is coping? It's important to be calm and proactive in your conversations with children – check in with them to see how they are doing. Their emotions will change and you need to show them that's okay. Children often take their emotional cues from the adults in their lives – so, it is important that adults manage their own emotions well and remain calm, listen to children's concerns, speak kindly and reassure them.

Is there anything I should look out for as my child starts back at school? Keep an eye out for signs of stress and anxiety. COVID-19 may be impacting your child's mental health, and it's important to demonstrate that it's normal and OK to feel overwhelmed at times. If you see your child is in distress, seek help from a school counselor or your EAP.

My child is worried about bullying at school and online, how can I talk to them about it?

It is important to let your child know that they are not alone and they can always talk to you. The more you talk about bullying to your children, the more comfortable they will be telling you if they see or experience it. **Check in** with your children daily and ask about their time at school and their activities online. **Ask them** about their feelings. Some children may not express their emotions verbally, so you should also look out for any anxious or aggressive behavior that may indicate something is wrong.

You should also engage your children in open and honest conversations about how to stay safe online. Have a conversation with your children about who they communicate with and how. If you notice your child becoming withdrawn or upset, or using their device more or less than usual, it could be a sign that they are being bullied online.

It's also important to familiarize yourself with your child's school's safeguarding and bullying policies, as well as the appropriate referral mechanisms and helplines available.

Don't forget, Best Care EAP has a **COVID Counseling helpline available 24/7, call 800-801-4182**. You can also email eap@bestcareeap.org to schedule an appointment.