

## From mountain to sea

### Educational Psychology Service Returning to school: Supporting Children's Worries



Many of us are experiencing a mixture of emotions about the return to school, and our children are no exception to this. Some of the emotions children experience will be positive (such as joy and excitement). Other emotions may indicate their fears or worries.

#### **ALL emotional responses are normal in times of uncertainty.**

For some children, the feelings that arise can be overwhelming. They are not always able to use words to convey this. Children are not “little adults”: their brains have not yet had the opportunity to develop the coping responses that we as adults have acquired through life experience.

Our understanding of brain development has increased a lot in recent years. For example, we know that:

- our ability to reason and regulate is still developing well into our twenties.
- human brains tend to look out for “negatives” or “threats”. This is not a reflection of personal failure. In fact, it is a positive evolutionary trait which, in the distant past, was important to our survival.

It is helpful therefore to bear in mind that for our children:

- their behaviors are often the main way they communicate with us, especially when it comes to emotions/feelings that they are not yet fully able to understand.
- They look to the adults closest to them for reassurance about these emotions.  
**This reassurance is provided through watching how the adult responds and comforts them.**

It also provides some explanation as to why, when we have achieved many good things in our day, it is the one thing that was not so good that often sticks out in our minds.

Here are a few ideas for how you can support your child at this time:

- If your child is already in a negative “cycle” of thought, you can gently help them to break that cycle. Activities that tap directly into the “senses” can be good for this (music, movement, rhythm, touch), as well as focusing on activities that

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they enjoy. The recently published Resilience Alphabet has some lovely ideas that you could consider. Access this resource at <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/scotland-learns/health-and-wellbeing-activities/resilience-alphabet/>

- Reinforce to your child that feeling “worried” or “nervous” is the **normal** response of our brains to something we are not sure about. It is not a reflection of their failure to cope.
- Children look to the adults around them for safety and protection. Yet, we as adults are not immune to the impact of powerful emotions. In fact: we are often so focused on supporting our children that we neglect the importance of looking after ourselves. Please do not feel guilty about taking time to do something you enjoy and find relaxing. It is also good to identify another adult who you can talk to about any concerns/fears you may hold when your child is out of ear shot. Or, if you wish, you can contact the Educational Psychology Service directly on 01779 403 721 (open Tuesday to Thursday 9am to 3pm) where you will be able to talk to a Psychologist about your worries.
- It is important to acknowledge your child’s feelings around any missed opportunities or disappointments that have arisen from lockdown. Equally, it is helpful to engage children in conversations about what they are looking forward to when they go back to school. This way, extra emphasis can be placed onto noticing the positives and opportunities that may arise in the future.
- Encourage (where appropriate) your child to try to problem solve for themselves. Having a sense of control can be supportive in reducing the impact of stressful life events. For example, you could extend the reassurance you offer by responding to your child’s question with another question (e.g. “I know you are worried about us getting ill, but what are the things we are doing to keep ourselves safe?”). This can help break what may seem like a larger problem down into smaller, manageable concerns with more clearly identifiable solutions.

### What if my child needs additional support?

It is recognised that some children may benefit from additional support to return to school. If you feel this may be the case for your child, it is important that you discuss this with your child’s school so that suitable options can be explored.

The Department of Child and Adolescent Mental Health also have a number of mental health and wellbeing resources which can be accessed via their website [www.camhs-resources.co.uk](http://www.camhs-resources.co.uk) should you wish to explore these.



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Please also visit the Educational Psychology website for further support and guidance at

<https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/as/aberdeenshireeps/>