



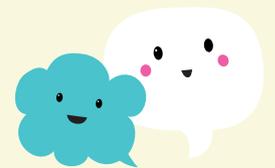
Separation Anxiety

10 Top Tips for Starting or Returning to Childcare or School

Life changed very quickly for us all as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and the need to stay home and stay safe. For your child life changed significantly, and for a large percentage of their lives so far.

Starting or returning to childcare or school will signal a big change, and how that change is supported could make a big difference to how your child builds resilience, and how they learn to cope now and in the future. It is natural for a child to experience different feelings and emotions, and exhibit different behaviours when changes are introduced. Starting or returning to childcare or school, after spending so much time at home and away from other children and adults, may cause some anxiety or concerns. This is a time when we, their parents and carers, can help them learn to cope by being alongside and reassuring them as they take these very individual steps.

- 1.** The most important thing you can do to prepare your child to start or return to childcare or school is to prepare yourself! Become familiar with any new procedures and find out what is expected at the childcare setting or school and why. By understanding what is happening, and by being reassured yourself, you will be in the best position to help your child. If you are fearful and anxious, your child will pick up on that and is likely to become fearful and anxious too.
- 2.** Take time to understand how your child may be feeling. They may be reluctant to return to life outside of the home after being at home for long periods with the family and having experienced a lengthy change in routine. They will have picked up information from you, siblings, family and media, and may have worries and concerns you could never imagine!
- 3.** Talk to your child about the virus and gently allay any fears as you talk about childcare or school. Remember to listen carefully to what your child tries to tell you and to observe body language too – not all children are able to express their fears very well when speaking - they may not have the language skills to do that, but they can tell us in other ways that they are worried.
- 4.** Let your child become their own Superhero by encouraging them to tackle the 'unseen' virus by washing hands regularly and good hygiene practices – give them a sense of control, as they are part of a positive community that is taking care of each other.
- 5.** Armed with the knowledge of what to expect and what your child thinks, you are well placed to help your child prepare for childcare or school. Talk positively about any new routines, about friends they will see and people they know. Talk about how key workers and teachers are looking forward to seeing them; and how they are ready to look after them, to help them play and to keep them safe.





6. Help your child get used to the new routine ahead of time. Perhaps re-instate new mealtimes, bedtimes and morning routines ahead of starting or going back to childcare or school if these have changed while everyone has been at home. This means the changes your child experiences are happening a little at a time.

7. Be aware that your child's behaviour around other people is likely to have changed, not only because they are concerned and worried but also because you have taught them to make that change! Running to a key worker or teacher for a hug and reassurance may have been normal before but you are likely to have taught your child not to do that with people outside of the home. Check with the keyworker or teacher what is now ok to help your child understand what they can do if they need re-assurance at childcare or school.

8. With new routines and a shared understanding of what is next you can both begin a positive transition back to childcare or school. Make decisions based on your child. If your child is in childcare, you may want to visit beforehand, to begin the transition again with a shorter session time and/or perhaps to build up to longer days. The time it takes to settle back in will vary but once you have prepared for return to this point remember to move forward with confidence and positivity. This helps your child feel that same confidence and energy so that they know that all is well as they take these next steps back into a wider world.

9. As you drop your child off at childcare or school reassure them; tell them where you will be and perhaps a little about what you will be doing; and who will pick them up and when. They will want to know you are thinking about them and may need to feel reassured that while routines have changed you are still coming back! If your child needs extra reassurance there are numerous small ways you can help them hold on to the link between you, them and home. Before adopting a method check that it is acceptable to the childcare setting or school - they are unlikely to want a host of visiting teddy bears but if they know about the 'home link' you are using they can encourage your child to use that pocketful of hugs and kisses they brought with them when needed!

10. At collection time greet your child positively, remove all distractions including phones, to show your child that they are the sole focus of your attention. Focus on the positive time they have had as they talk about their day using this time to link to what they might do the next day at childcare or school.



Remember that younger children will communicate anxieties in different ways including behavioural changes, tears, tantrums, clinginess and sometimes withdrawal. Try to 'listen' to these cues that are seen rather than always heard and reassure your child accordingly. Work with the childcare or school to monitor this re-settling in period and be prepared for your child to need you more as they adjust to a new routine.

For more information on this and advice on parenting, visit:

-  gov.wales/parenting-give-it-time/stay-positive/give-them-time
-  gov.wales/parenting-give-it-time
-  [parentsinwales](https://www.facebook.com/parentsinwales)
-  [parenting.wales](https://www.instagram.com/parenting.wales)



Stay Safe. Stay Positive.

Source
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