

Education: Wellbeing Renewal

Guidance for Parents and
Carers on Supporting
Children's Wellbeing



ADVICE TO PARENTS ON SUPPORTING WORRIES CHILDREN MAY HAVE AS SCHOOLS AND ECCS REOPEN

For more in-depth advice please see the 'Pan Ayrshire Preparing Neurodiverse Children for the Return to School' guidance.

[Parent-Guidance-Return-to-school](#)

[Child Anxiety Resources](#)

While this is aimed at children with additional support needs, a lot of the advice within it is helpful for all children.

TOP TIPS

Here are some tips on how to talk to and reassure your child. Should your child continue to be concerned about going to nursery or school, and these do not decrease with time and reassurance, **please speak directly to your child's school or ECC**. The more aware they are the better they can support your child or seek appropriate support from other agencies, if required.

The advice below is based on the very readable and accessible work of Tina Payne Bryson and Daniel Siegel, starting with their Whole Brain Child approach. This approach takes into account how our children's brains work and tries to help explain communication with children in a way that is most helpful to them.

For further information, books, online videos etc., please see:

<https://www.tinabryson.com/blog>

Change

One of the things we are having to learn to deal with at the moment is **ongoing uncertainty**. This might be hard for you and/or your child. Your child may be unsure about physically returning to school and what that means, will it be the same or different? We all differ in our ability to cope with stress and change, so some children will need more reassurance and support than others. The vast majority of children will transition back to school and nursery well, where they are well supported at home and at school.

Your child's school or nursery will make you and your child aware of changes to the normal routines in advance of the return. Please take time to talk to your child or show them any videos or pictures the school or ECC have sent. Some possible changes might be:

- Changes to the entry procedures for school and drop off and pick up
- Additional handwashing and hygiene routines
- Adults being physically distanced
- Staggered breaks and lunchtimes
- Changes to where they eat snack and how they get their lunches

Keep it Simple & Honest

Children may have lots of questions or no questions at all about their return to school.

They may want to know things like:

'Will I be able to play/speak to my friends?'

'Will teachers help me if I am stuck?'

As far as possible tell them honestly what you are aware will be happening. Children often get stressed and upset, or act out when what they expect is not the reality. That's why home school/ECC communication is so important at the best of times, but especially as we start this year with lots of unknowns or changing routines and guidelines.

As the guidance from Scottish Government continues to adapt to respond to rates of COVID-19 transmission, the safety measures that schools and ECCs will have to implement will differ. As such, schools and ECCs will keep regular communication with parents and carers to ensure you are aware of changes to practice. This may differ from one school or ECC to another.

If you can't answer any questions that your child may have, please ask your child's school/ECC. Please follow your child's school/ECC procedures for communicating with them. Please keep checking school communication routes such as the School App to keep up to date on any changes and information.

Accepting Your Child's Feelings and Making Space to Talk

Research shows us that children cope best when they experience the **4 Ss**: they feel **Safe, Seen, Soothed, and Secure**. We can do that by:

- simply listening
- helping them to label their feelings
- supporting them in asking the questions they need to ask
- and accepting and noticing whatever it is they are experiencing

When they **feel** seen and heard they are more likely to have a sense of safety and security. Changes to their lives can make them feel less safe, e.g. being away from their family after such a long period at home every day, not knowing what to expect from school, worrying about new school routines and classes, etc..

This makes them feel less safe for a wee while and we can help them feel safer, seen and soothed by how we listen to and respond to their worries, helping them learn how to use adults to help them before their anxieties feel overwhelming to them.

For example:

If your child is upset and shares that he is anxious and worried that he might get sick with the virus and miss school, and will get behind on his work, it's important that your child's experience of sharing that with you is a positive one. That way they know that coming to you and talking to you is a good thing 😊

Try to avoid a **'dismiss and deny'** response that can unintentionally make your child feel you're not that interested in their feelings about it, or that you're not able to handle their big feelings. Instead we can **'name it to tame it'**.

Below are some examples and explanations of **Name it to Tame it; Feeling Safe, Seen and Soothed;** and **Connect and Redirect** as ways that can help reduce worries and anxiety.

Dismiss & Deny (Can feel like 'Get on with it and deal with it on your own')	Name it to Tame It (Can feel like 'I'm here, I'm listening. We'll get through this together')
<p><i>Don't cry. You'll be fine. You're perfectly healthy now. Just make sure to wash your hands and not pick your nose and you'll be fine. You won't need to miss school. Let's talk about something less depressing.</i></p> <p>In that scenario, the child may not feel truly seen and heard. His perception is his reality and he's scared.</p>	<p><i>I can see you're worried about this I know you worry about falling behind. Do you remember when you were sick in December? What happened then when you went back to school?</i></p> <p><i>You spoke to the school. My teacher spoke to me on my own & helped me with a plan of how to finish the work I missed. And she emailed you about the plan, too. And you helped me.</i></p> <p><i>There are a lot of people who care about you and will help you again just like they did before if you need to miss school. We'll make sure to take care of you if that happens. AND we can do lots of things to keep our family healthy, and school are doing lots of things to keep you all safe.</i></p>

Safe	Seen	Soothed
<p>Letting them know that people will keep them safe, that you will be there for them, that their teachers and ELCP will keep them safe. Acknowledge their feelings & worries so they feel safe.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tune into their mental state by being present • Trying to understand their inner life • Responding to what we see in a timely and effective manner. 	<p>When a child is distressed on the inside that negative experience can be shifted by an adult who tunes in & listens. They might still suffer, but at least they won't feel alone. This is how they learn to provide 'inner soothing' on their own</p>
<p><i>Everything is going to be ok. No matter what the problem, we'll find a way to work it out</i> <i>Your teachers will keep you safe</i> <i>If you are worried you can talk to...</i> <i>We will see you at...</i> <i>Give that worry to me to look after for you. I'll talk to Mr X...</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrative facial expressions, big smiles on leaving & arriving • Remembering stories and things they have told you about school, ECC, their feelings • <i>I love you and I know you can do this. I can see you look a bit worried</i> • <i>I can't wait to hear about your day later</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hugs • Feeling understood • <i>I am so proud of you, you were a bit worried about that, but you did it!</i> • <i>I hope you are proud of yourself</i> • <i>I can see that you are feeling a wee bit worried, that's ok, almost everybody will be feeling a wee bit like that at the</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What was the best thing that happened today?</i> • <i>It so lovely to see you! I've missed you. You look a bit sad, want to talk?</i> • <i>I wonder if you've been really grumpy the last few days because something is bothering you? I wonder if its...</i> 	<p><i>moment. Everything feels a bit different'</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>So you're telling me you hate having to sit on your own on the bus? That's hard, I would hate that too. It's so frustrating that that's the way it has to be just now.</i>
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Connect and Redirect

Children and teenagers might be very easily tired, more irritable and act out through their behaviour. The most effective way of managing this, which leads to a reduction in their stress over time and helps them feel Safe, Seen & Soothed, is to **Connect** with their feeling and then **Redirect** the behaviour and set the limit.

We might not **like** the behaviour, we can **accept** the feeling behind it, but not the behaviour itself.

Some examples are below:

- *It's ok to be tired after a long day at school, it's been ages since you've been at school for so long. I get that you are tired and annoyed, but it's not ok to hit your brother. That hurts him and it hurts my feelings.*
- *It's ok to be annoyed about getting ready in the morning. We need to get out of the house earlier now, but it's not ok to speak to me like that. That's rude.*
- *I get that you are done with being sociable after a busy day at school, I'm tired too now. But you can go and have some quiet time to watch TV instead of yelling at your sister to get out of your face. That hurts her feelings. She's only wee, she doesn't know you've had enough of everyone.*
- *I know you are sad about leaving Mum. It's ok to have a wee cry, it's a change. Here let's have a hug and I will be back for you at the end of the day. Your teachers will keep you safe. I always come back. I love you.*

Manage your own worries about the return

Adults really do set the emotional tone for our children. As mammals our brains are held captive to one another. Our chaos or calm are contagious, especially to those we spend the most time with. If you're feeling panicked or chaotic internally, and obsessive about the return to school, your child is likely to increase their level of anxiety and they will focus on what they *can't* control. When children are anxious it can look like defiance, cheekiness, aggression, laziness, tuning out as well as how we more often think of how anxiety looks.

If you are informed, calm internally, and share bits of information about what we *can* control, you will reduce your child's anxiety. You can say something like *'It's great news that the doctors know how this virus gets spread. That means we know some things we can do to be safe. Your school are doing all of those things to keep you all safe.'*

If your own anxiety is feeling more chaotic and higher than you would like and you're having a hard time managing it, try walking outside, walks in nature, exercise, talking with a good friend or family member, and contact the school about any particular school related worries you might have, and if needed, seek professional support.

Adapted from:

[Tina Bryson Whole Brain Approach](#)

Additional helpful information and advice for parents available from:

- [Parent club](#)
- [Scottish Qualifications Authority – Coronavirus \(Joint Statement with the Scottish Government\)](#)
- [Ayrshire College – coronavirus update](#)
- [COSLA - COVID-19 advice for children and young people](#)
- [Young Scot](#)

