

Back to school support guide for families and carers

Starting a new school year can be an exciting time, but it can also bring change, uncertainty, and big feelings for children and families. This guide offers practical Allied Health-informed strategies to support a positive and supported return to school.

The ideas in this resource are flexible. Not everything will work for every child, and that is okay. Support looks different for everyone.

Supporting a smooth transition back to school

Changes in routine, expectations, and environments can be challenging for some children. Preparation and predictability can help reduce stress. Helpful strategies include:

- Talking through what the school day will look like
- Being explicit with time frames, e.g. “School starts back again in two days, so you’ll be getting up at 7am.”
- Using visual schedules or simple routines
- Talking through and practising morning or after-school routines ahead of time
- Visiting the school or classroom, if possible



Focus on what will stay the same, as well as what will be different.

Supporting regulation and behaviour

Some children may show changes in behaviour during the first weeks of school. This does not mean you or they are doing something wrong. Supportive approaches include:

- Keeping routines consistent where possible
- Breaking tasks into smaller steps
- Asking your child for input
- Offering choices to support a sense of control, e.g. “Should we get dressed or brush our teeth first?”
- Noticing what helps your child feel calm and settled



Understanding behaviour in context can help identify what support is needed. For example, if your child seems to have a harder time regulating on Tuesday afternoons, maybe something about Tuesdays is tough for them.

Therapeutic supports to reach your goals.

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Supporting emotional wellbeing

Children may experience a range of emotions when returning to school, including excitement, worry, or frustration.

You can support emotional wellbeing by:

- Naming and validating feelings
- Offering reassurance and calm support
- Modelling coping strategies, such as slow breathing or taking breaks, e.g. "I am going to count to 10 as I am feeling annoyed."
- Encouraging rest and downtime after school



Behaviour is often a form of communication, especially during times of change.

Working in partnership with schools

Open communication with schools can help children feel supported.

You may find it helpful to:

- Share information about your child's strengths and support needs
- Let teachers know what helps your child regulate and learn
- Ask how communication will work during the term
- Check in early if concerns arise
- Ask if there is anything that can be done at home, drop off, or pick up to help
- Find out what strategies help at school and try and use these at home if possible



A collaborative approach supports consistency at home and school.

When extra support may help

It can be helpful to seek additional support if you notice:

- Ongoing distress or anxiety about school
- Changes in sleep, mood or behaviour that persist
- Difficulties settling into routines after the first few weeks

Allied health supports can help explore what is happening and identify practical strategies. It is okay to ask for support for yourself as well. You do not need to navigate this alone.



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