



Education & Children's Services  
Educational Psychology Service



# Return to School

Advice for Young People, Parents and Carers  
Upper Primary and S1

Using Psychology to Support a Positive Return to School



On 23rd March 2020 the United Kingdom went into lockdown in response to Covid-19. All schools closed and children began home learning. Apart from taking some daily exercise as a family group, children have been confined within their home environment. Interaction with extended family and peers has been limited to those with access to social media. This has become the new norm for our pupils.

There is no indication yet when restrictions will be lifted. However, children will return to school at some point and it is important to consider what will help ease this transition when the time comes. Transitions are important for children and young people and can be a challenging and anxiety provoking time, particularly when the child or young person is vulnerable or has additional support needs. One thing is clear, on returning to school after social distancing and isolation, children, families and communities will need considerable time and support to deal with illness, loss and bereavement, manage mental health and support friendships and relationships. This leaflet sets out some ideas for families to consider when planning for a positive return to school.



While there is no current research on how best to reintroduce children to formal school learning following the lifting of Covid-19 lockdown measures, psychology can highlight broad themes from studies where pupils have returned to school following a long absence.



## Risks Experienced by Children

Government statistics indicate that there has been a surge in domestic abuse incidents since lockdown was put in place. Children who have witnessed domestic abuse may be likely to present with high levels of anxiety and difficulties settling to learn. Multi-agency planning will be required to support these parents and children going forward.

## Resilience

The key finding is that most children are RESILIENT. Good communication, caring staff with supportive relationships, effective planning and the safety and predictability of routines will effectively settle most children back into schools. Most pupils will require no formal intervention but will benefit from the support naturally given by family and friends as well as other key adults in their lives.

## Anxiety

Research indicates that some children will require additional support to manage ANXIETY in the shorter term. Children are highly attuned to parental anxieties. Given the economic impact of the pandemic many adults will be anxious about their jobs/sources of income and ability to pay household bills. TV and media reports can also have a cumulative effect causing concerns about present and future health. Additional planning by the team around the child for highly anxious pupils will benefit and support them into school.

## Relationships

Many children will be anxious about the loss of RELATIONSHIPS. The relationships in school that pupils have built over the years with key adults, as well as peers, may have become more fragile during social isolation. Pupils will require time to adjust and support to reconnect with and rebuild these trusting relationships.

## Bereavement and Loss

Children may also require support to cope with BEREAVEMENT AND LOSS. It is probable that most children may return to school knowing of someone who has died. Some will have faced the death of a significant person in their lives. Educational Psychology Service have Bereavement and Loss leaflets available on the website.

A minority of pupils are likely to require intensive interventions and long-term support.

# Transition to Secondary School

## Advice for Young People and their Parents and Carers



### Things to think about just now

Social connectedness is strongly linked to positive outcomes such as being motivated to learn and good mental health. It is important to continue with this during a time when schoolwork is being done at home. These are some ideas for how to do this:

- Keep relationships going with friends through online platforms where you can speak to your friends and see them
- Use any opportunities to connect with your classmates either in groups, whole class or individually - many schools are providing opportunities for this
- Keep in touch with your teachers online but also through direct contact with them if this is possible.

### Learning at home

- Keep going with a daily routine of getting up in the morning, brushing teeth and having meals and snacks throughout the day. Plan in times for learning, socialising, exercising and relaxation around mealtimes. Make the weekend different from Monday-Friday.
- Keep going with learning tasks, chunking your activities can really help concentration and remember, if you are having a day where learning is not going well it is ok to take a break and come back to it at a later point.
- If you are struggling to stay motivated, continue with activities which are linked to school tasks but focus on those you enjoy.
- Where it is possible try to keep up with any extra-curricular activities. For example, this could be keeping fit or practising an instrument. Where possible continue relationships with other people you know who also do these activities through online platforms.



## Planning a transition

- Liaise with your school over any transition programmes they may be offering online or by other means.
- Once known, use the information given which describes the school so that you can rehearse this in advance with your child. However prepare them for some flexibility or change.
- Rehearse with your child regularly that they will be starting or returning to school, you are not sure when, but that staff are working on arrangements in line with advice.
- Provide reassurance that everyone is in the same position and if questions arise note them so you can ask them at a later date.
- Explore the school website with your child where you may be able to have a virtual tour of the school and see photos or introductions from staff members.
- Consider summarising key information about your child which would be useful for new staff to know – you could do this with you child.
- Where possible walk past your school or through the grounds during your daily exercise session.
- Try and keep some links with other children who will be starting / returning to school either by phone or video connection.

## At the point of returning to school

- If questions arise that you cannot find answers to online, contact your nominated staff member through email or phone in advance
- Children will need time to process and adjust to their new experience of school – in usual circumstances it takes a while for children and young people to adjust to a new situation and following this, additional time will be needed
- Take time to discuss and review the school day, what went well and what they are finding difficult.
- Provide re-assurance that this is a new experience for all and that they will need longer than usual to adjust.
- Discuss a plan for different parts of the day to create new routines. For example, at a calm time in the evening discuss a plan for the next day such as what needs to happen before school and the tasks that need to be done after school. This should help decrease stress around these busy times. It will help to review how you feel the plan went and what went well and what you might do differently next time.



# Common Worries Children Have About Starting Secondary School

The sheer size of a high school, with lots of people you do not know, can be scary but here are a few facts that might help reassure you:

- Class sizes are usually similar to primary, however this is likely to be different given the current circumstances. Practical sets, for example, Home Economics, Music and Drama, tend to be smaller again
- Just a little 'heads up' - secondary classrooms are likely to look different initially to ensure schools are in keeping with social distancing rules from the Scottish Government. You might not move around as much as you normally would either. Schools will show you what your classroom(s) might look like when you go back to school
- Pupils tend to interact within their own year group, so you'll be mixing mostly with other S1s
- Many of the pupils in your registration group will be in your classes
- In the beginning many S1s tend to stay in their primary school group of friends for break and lunch times – over time you will get to know other people and make different friends. School staff will help you with this
- The school may send you a map and may be able to show you a virtual tour of the school and each department, so you get an idea of what to expect in each subject and classroom
- There will always be someone around to help you or your class group get to the right room whenever you get lost - teachers expect you to take time to find your way around
- You should have a guidance teacher and a senior pupil as known people to go to if you have any worries or concerns.

## What about that first day?

- Get in touch with your primary school friends and share what your contact with school will be.
- If you don't have an older sibling then ask a friend who has about school uniform – this will help you feel that you fit in.
- Organise your bag and uniform in the days before you start school.



## What if the work is too hard?

- Your work in high school will be similar in some ways to primary but may involve other subjects. This will take time to get used to and remember everything takes practice.
- If there is something you have always found difficult your teachers should already know about this from primary school information.

## And just a few more things...

- One thing you can do right now is to make sure that the friendships you have with other Primary 7s remain strong.
- Use social media to chat as a group about high school.
- Support one another to be positive.
- If you have questions, then each of you take one thing to find out and feedback to the group.



## Links to useful resources

### General Advice

- Fife Council Educational Psychology Service - <http://www.fife.gov.uk/educationalpsychology>
- GIRFEC, Emotional Wellbeing Page - <https://girfec.fife.scot/emotional-health-and-mental-wellbeing/>

### Loss and Bereavement

The Educational Psychology Service website has information on bereavement and loss leaflets for parents, carers and young people, including bereavement during Covid19.

- Child Bereavement UK - <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>
- Winstonswish - <https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus/>

### Domestic Violence

- Safer Scotland - <https://safer.scot/>
- The Hideout - <http://thehideout.org.uk/>

