

# Back to School



FREE  
E BOOK



Tips for helping your child return  
to school with confidence.

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# Welcome!

Thank you so much for downloading this e-book. I'm so happy that you have found us. Ink and Scribbles is a place where you can find resources, tools and support that help you emotion coach your child.

Transitions are hard for many children. If you take a moment to put yourself in your child's shoes, it becomes very clear that the start of a new school year will bring some emotional wobbles and worries. As adults, it is easy for us to forget how these moments felt when we were younger, or brush over them amongst the busy back to school preparations. If you have noticed your child has increased emotional outbursts, is more irritable, struggling with sleep or seems more withdrawn in the run up to the school year starting, they may have some back to school anxiety or worry. This is likely to be a temporary, and understandable, response to the prospect of new routines, new staff and classrooms, unknown expectations and organisation plus re-establishing friendships. Take a moment to imagine how it would feel to start a new job or a new role within a work situation. This is how your child is probably feeling, but without the life experience or regulation tools to manage their feelings!

However, these are moments we can use to teach wellbeing tools and support our children through these changes which will help them develop the resilience they need to navigate challenges as they grow. It can be overwhelming for us, as parents, to see our children struggle and the temptation can be to 'take away' the obstacle. But I hope this e book gives you some direction and reassurance as you help your child transition back to school and watch them become a remarkable, resilient kid!

Big Love,  
Ruth



# Validate their anxiety



Feeling nervous, worried or anxious is a normal response to change, uncertainty and the unknown. It's important that children know that feeling anxious is understandable and that the emotion can't hurt them. Often the physical discomfort associated with worry and anxiety can be as unsettling as the circumstances triggering them! Knowing that those sensations are a sign of the brain's response to change is reassuring for your child.

Let your child know that feeling anxious about returning to school or starting school is OK. Avoid saying things like, 'it will be fine' or 'don't be silly' and validate their feeling so they understand it's OK to feel what they are feeling.

Examples of supportive things you could say are:

**"Starting a new school year can make you a bit nervous."**

**"It's been a while since you've been at school, so it will feel strange for a short while."**

**"This is your first year at school so you're feeling nervous because it's a new experience for you. I can help you through it."**

# Normalise their anxiety.

Let your child know that you feel worried sometimes too. Use the example of a similar experience, such as when you returned to school as a child, or starting a new job etc.

Feeling worried or anxious about returning to school can leave a child feeling isolated. Some might assume they aren't supposed to feel worried. Some might look at others and assume they feel relaxed about going back to school, when actually, it can be hard to know what someone else is feeling.

Emotions and feelings can be complex and confusing for small children. Other adults might make a sweeping statement, such as "Oh you must be looking forward to going to school!". Despite the good intentions this can leave a child feeling confused if they don't feel this way! We can help our children by normalising the confusion they might feel with statements such as:

**"It's normal to feel all sorts of feelings about going back to school. One day you might feel nervous. Another day you might feel excited!"**

**"I feel worried about changes in work sometimes. It's because it feels unfamiliar. I usually relaxed very quickly though, once things settle."**

It's also important to remember that excitement and worry can feel physically similar and may be misinterpreted. Both feelings can cause stomach butterflies or shaky limbs. It's also possible to feel both at the same time!

There are several levels of feelings that come under the worry/anxiety heading, so exploring an anxiety thermometer may help your child identify their emotion more accurately.

# Teach them about the brain and anxiety.

It's empowering for children to understand why they feel worried, anxious or nervous.

Every child I've worked with noticeably relaxes when they realise they are not their emotion ( i.e. they're feeling worried as apposed to being a worried person) and that things around them can trigger an automatic brain response. Separating this response from themselves can lead to instant change in their emotional landscape.

Try to explain in a way that is appropriate for your child's age, that change doesn't always feel comfortable which can result in the brain initiating it's fight or flight mode. Our brains tend resist change, but actually WE can decide for ourselves if change will be a positive thing! This means that although returning to school brings some uncertainty, we can help our children turn their attention to more helpful thinking that promotes feelings of confidence.



**There are several parts of me that are involved in emotions. When it comes to anxiety, I can be super protective and events can make me raise an alarm without you even knowing that's what's happened. You might just sense the physical responses such as tight chest or butterflies.**

# Guide positive thinking.

Talking about the positive things that will come from being at school can help your child focus on more helpful thoughts and tune out the negative or 'what if' thinking that often occurs with worry. Often we worry about things that won't even happen and this strategy can help your child think more accurately.

If they have specific worries you can guide them around those with questions such as:

- what is most likely to happen?
- what if it goes well?

Turn negative thinking into positives e.g.  
I'm not in the same class as my best friend.

## **becomes**

I'm not in the same class as my best friend **BUT** I've got the chance to make some new friends.

Teach your child to use their body posture to induce feelings of confidence. When they hold their head up, shoulders back etc, they will automatically feel more confident. Confidence involves action. it's not something we just have or don't have but instead is something we must foster in ourselves.



# Prepare

Preparing for what is to come helps our brains feel more familiar and certain, which is helpful in times of change. When the first day arrives, your child's brain will know what to expect which will reduce feelings of anxiety.

Prepare your child for the logistics around the return to school so they can visualise their school day. Examples of helpful preparations include:

- Do the walk or drive to school.
- Prepare them for changes that will be in place due to the pandemic.
- Try on uniform.
- Prepare younger children with any images from the school website/information that has been sent of classrooms or staff.
- Role Play with younger children.
- Start to reintroduce routines closer to the start dates.
- Start to talk about school in everyday conversations in a positive and light way.



# Make use of wellbeing tools

Transitioning to a new school year, or starting a new school, is a great opportunity to teach and practise lifelong wellbeing tools. Life throws challenges and resilience is a key life skill to develop.

Examples of wellbeing tools that support the back to school transition are:

- Use affirmations daily between now and starting school (and beyond) to boost positive subconscious thinking.
- Teach some breathing techniques your child can use at home and at school.
- Teach some calming/grounding techniques and make sure they know which ones can help them (we love a weighted blanket and essential oils). Other examples include, regulating by getting out for a walk or creative activities such as drawing.
- Plan a way for your child to feel connected to you when at school. This can be an important element of feeling secure for many children. Something small they can keep in their pocket or sewn on to their top works well or use lunch box notes.
- Make an action plan now for specific worries so they feel prepared and empowered with a 'go to' strategy.



# Give them time to unwind after school

Once they've started school, try and give them time to relax and decompress from their day. Some children need more time to readjust to being at home than others.

After being in a different environment, with a huge range of expectations and challenges to navigate for such a long time, it's understandable that being in school will raise the adrenaline levels. Many children are able to regulate or suppress their emotions during the school day but find they overflow and need to release on returning to their safe space ... home. This is called After School Restraint Collapse. Strategies to support this include providing a healthy snack straight after school, asking only open questions or talking about your own day (as opposed to asking direct and closed questions about theirs), or creating a special yet simple after school activity that nurtures connection (reading a book, a snuggle and a favourite TV show together).

Support the transition period by easing back into routines and after school activities gradually and give them a predictable routine, quiet activities at the end of the day and encourage good sleep.



# How can Ink and Scribbles help?

Our shop, The Kids Den, is packed with a range of resources that will help you teach your child the skills they need to develop their Emotional Intelligence. I've written and created printables that will give you and your child the direction and support you need to navigate the back to school transition.

[Browse the  
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