

Welfare Matters

Lent 2021 Edition 2

Being a good listener



We are delighted to be able to have pupils and students back on site as I am sure you are too! However, going back to school can be scary for children, whatever their age. At school we fully recognise that this could be an unsettling time for your child, but it can also be an anxious time for you as parents. Hopefully this newsletter will help to alleviate some of these anxieties as well as helping to make it as smooth a transition as possible. The newsletter covers tips to help make the transition back to school as smooth as possible. I also look at the idea of a what makes a good listener; it is more important than ever that we engage our young people in conversation and really hear what they have to say.

Anxiety busters

Wearing of masks



Tips for going back to school after lockdown

- **Get your child to write down their worries and hopes:** Getting your child to undertake this activity will help them to think about, and articulate, everything they're looking forward to at school, and everything they're worried about. It would be good to be able to talk to your child about these prior to returning next week. They can also talk to a trusted adult at school as well.
- **Encourage your child to ask questions:** Undoubtedly your child will have some concerns, no matter whether they are in Year 6 or Upper Sixth! Encouraging them to ask questions at home and school will help to alleviate any worries or concerns. Talk to your child about how they are feeling about going back to school and try not to make assumptions (see our guide on how to be a good listener for more info). Ask them if they are worried or feel scared about anything, but also if they are excited about or looking forward to something. No matter how your child feels, let them know that it is completely normal to feel a mixture of emotions and that everyone will be in the same boat.
- **Talk about what's happened during lockdown:** Everyone's experience of lockdown is different. A lot of young people have really struggled, particularly with their mental health. Whatever's happened, talking about it can help. Whether that be at home with you, or with a trusted adult at school. Our Time to Talk service is fully operational, we can also offer support, for those that need it, via the school counsellor.
- **Prepare for coming back:** Ensure your child uses the consolidation day on Friday to make sure their work is up to date and that they find all the uniform and equipment that they will need for the following week. **Re-establish a routine to help ease into school life.** During lockdown it is understandable that your family's routine may have changed. Children are likely to have been waking up later or going to bed later. If they are not used to getting up early, it will help to start setting an alarm and ensuring that they go to bed earlier prior to starting back.

Tips for going back to school after lockdown (cont.)



- **Prepare for COVID measures at school:** Although your child will be delighted to be back at school, it is important that they continue to follow all guidance on social distancing to keep everyone safe. There will be staff and pupils who are anxious about this and we need to keep everyone safe. Also, please prepare your child for the fact that they will have to wear face masks when indoors, including whilst in lessons. It will be a good idea to ensure that they have a sufficient supply in their bags. Once back in your child's tutor will take time to talk them through routines and the school day.
- **It's OK if your child takes time to settle:** It may take time for your child to adjust to being back in school. Reassure them that it's OK if it doesn't feel comfortable at first. Don't put pressure on yourself. The transition back into school is likely to take some time. Lots of children will experience ups and downs. Try your best to support, reassure and comfort them, without putting pressure on yourself to make sure their homework is done or they settle into a new routine straightaway. Even when they come back to school, encourage them to make time every day to do something they enjoy.
- **Think ahead:** As well as reflecting on what has happened during the past few weeks, it is important to help children develop hope and a sense of excitement for the future. At a time like this, it can be hard to feel positive, but identifying the things that they can look forward to will help them to realise that the current situation won't last forever and their feelings will change.
- **Seek support if you need it:** Transitioning back to school after being in lockdown is no easy task. You may find that your child struggles to get back into school or experiences difficulties while they're at school. If this is the case, reach out to us as soon as you can so that you can make us aware of the challenges and then we can work together to support your child. If you are concerned about your child's mental health and you think they need professional support, speak us and your GP about the best next step.

Being a good listener



At this time of uncertainty, it's important to be a good listener to your child so they feel they can talk to you about their feelings. Try these steps to becoming an active listener:

1. Turn devices off to show that you're listening.
2. Squat down to the same level as your child and maintain eye contact. However as I'm sure many of you are aware, that many teenagers often don't like eye contact.
3. Smile and use a gentle tone of voice.
4. Try to avoid impatient body language like eye rolling, foot tapping or sighing. This can discourage children from talking.
5. Put your own thoughts and feelings to one side.
6. Allow your child space to talk without interrupting or contradicting them.
7. Don't be afraid of silence if your child is using it to reflect and think, but step in if the silence feels uncomfortable.
8. Find encouraging things to say, like 'Tell me more,' 'And then?' and 'Go on, what else?'

Anxiety busters

If your child is feeling unsettled about going back to school, the following exercises could help to reduce their feelings of anxiety. If one doesn't work, just try another, and then make it a valued part of their day.

Mindfulness breathing: Focus on your breath and imagine a sailing boat that rises and falls on a wave with each breath. Alternatively, imagine your breath as a colour (breathe in blue and breathe out yellow).

Body scan: Lie on the floor in a comfortable position. Close your eyes, squeeze every muscle as tight as you can and then relax all your muscles. Think about how your body feels. Squish your toes and feet, squeeze your hands into fists and make your legs and arms as hard as stone. After a few seconds, release and relax your toes, feet, hands, legs and arms.

Heartbeat exercise: Jump up and down or do star jumps for one minute. Sit down and put your hand over your heart, then close your eyes and pay attention to your heartbeat and your breath.

One-minute breathing: Using a timer, how many breaths can you count in one minute? One breath counts as in and out.

Breathing buddies: Lie down and place a soft toy, cuddly, small pillow or cushion on your belly. Notice how it rises and falls with your breath. Pay attention to the rise and fall for a few breaths.

54321: This technique will take your child through their five senses to help remind them of the present. Take a deep breath and then notice five things you can see, four things you can hear, three things you can touch, two things you can smell and then take one more deep breath.

For more details and guidance on how to support your child with their anxieties and stress, please join us for our Pastoral Evening on Monday 15th March, where Mrs Lambert will be leading a very informative session in this area!

Keeping the community safe ... wearing of masks



Although school's are reopening their sites, we must remember that the rest of the country is still in a full lockdown, until the 29th March. Indeed the rest of the government's roadmap is dependent on the first stage being a success. To maintain the wellbeing of all our community we need to ensure basic manners, politeness and kindness are top of everyone's agenda. Part of this is the wearing of a mask. Although we fully appreciate that this is uncomfortable for some, it is part of the government's regulations. However, we also wear masks not only to keep ourselves safe, but also to protect others around us, therefore supporting their

wellbeing. To that end we do ask that you ensure that your child has a mask, and at least one spare, on them everyday and that they follow the guidance which will be detailed to them by their tutors, as to when they have to be worn. Unfortunately, if a pupil refuses to wear them without having the necessary exemptions, then we may have to send them home so that we can continue to keep the school community safe. Following the rules and procedures now, will help us all get back to a sense of normality sooner, which is something we all crave. I thank you for your support in this.

Pastoral Evening ... date for your diary!

We would like to invite you all to an online Pastoral Evening on Monday 15th March at 5:00pm. We will be covering a variety of informative pastoral topics that will hopefully give you the tools to better help support your child. There will be three main sessions that cover the following topics:

- Provision of wellbeing support at school;
- Relationship and Sex Education at school;

- Helping young people deal with anxieties and stress. The evening will finish with you having the opportunity to speak with your child's Head of Year, via a bespoke Q&A session. The event will be held on Zoom and these are the codes that you will need:

Meeting ID: 711 6461 7619

Passcode: langpast1