

Supporting Your Child As They Return to A “New Normal”

It has been a couple months now since the beginning of the COVID 19 Pandemic in which places were forced to close and we had to shelter in place in our homes. For many of us, our regular routines shifted drastically and the life as your child knew it changed. They were no longer able to go to school or attend child care or participate in their extracurricular programs. Socializing with loved ones and friends became virtual vs face to face and in person interactions were reduced to none. Over these few months, your child spent a lot of time with just you and those in your household and the furthest they may have travelled outside was around the neighbourhood.

Now as things start to open back up and restrictions begin to ease, you may be wondering how you can support your child as they venture back to normal. The hard truth is that things may not be “normal” for quite some time and we all may have to adjust to a “new normal”. Therefore, this transition is not going to be a typical transition back and your child may need your patience and sensitivity to support this transition.

Here are some ways you can support your child as they return to the “new normal”.

Talk about the “new normal”

Have conversations with your child explaining what is currently going on and what is going to happen. Like mentioned, your child has spent a lot of time with you and may have gotten used to being around you 24/7. Understandably, separation may be difficult for both you and your child. If you or your household members will be now returning to work and or your child will be going back to childcare, start communicating this with your child. Using simple language, you can explain that even though it was nice being home and you enjoyed spending time together, you have to go back to work but you will be back at the end of the day. They may have many questions like, “Can I hug my friends?” or “Is it safe to go outside?” Try to answer these questions honestly, in a manner that is appropriate for their age.



Explain new procedures and practices.

After being at home for quite some time, when children return to being out in public or to their regular programs, they will notice things are different. Prepare them for these changes by explaining some of the new measures such as physical distancing, waiting in lines to go to the store, temperature

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checks and screenings that may be done before entering buildings. It may also help to find out some of the new procedures the programs or the childcare your child attends will have in place before you go so you can help prepare your child. Role play and practicing some of these new procedures may help your child get use to and ease some of their worries. Seeing people wearing mask may also be new and frightening to your child, talk about it or you can even demonstrate what it looks like with the mask on and off.

Here is a resource on explaining to young children why people wear mask. - <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3211-why-are-people-wearing-masks-why-are-people-covering-their-faces>

Get back into routine.

Since being at home your child's routine may have changed. They may have had a later bed time or was able to sleep in longer. Make the return to normal bedtimes a gradual process so the transition will be easier. Remind them of what the daily routines looked like before COVID and discuss what it may look like once returning. Using pictures may help your child to visualize the routines or engaging in pretend play with your child by acting out daily routines such as get dressed may help to jog their memory.

Acknowledge and validate your child's feelings.

COVID 19 has been an unusual and unexpected event for us all. Many of us are dealing with it in very different ways, including our children. Listen to your child's worries and concerns. Acknowledge and validate their feelings. Let them know it is normal to have these feelings and help them work through ways of dealing with them.

Also pay attention to nonverbal messages. Your child may not always be able to express their feelings through words. They may start acting out or displaying behaviours that you may never have seen before or may have previously out grown. Behaviours such as separation anxiety, tantrums, withdrawal, crying, toileting accidents and baby talk may happen more often. These may be the ways your child is processing and dealing with the big changes and stressful experiences happening in their lives.

Share your calm.

Recognize your own emotions and understand that children can easily pick up on the emotions of others. Children may not always fully understand what may be going on around them, but they can sense the anxiety and fear. Although it may be difficult at times, try to remain positive and focus on what you can control.

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As we all navigate this transition together, remember to be kind to yourself, to your children and to others as this new for everyone. Children are quite resilient and will typically adjust over time to a new normal. With your patience, understanding and reassurance to help them feel safe and supported, they will be able to work through this new phase of their lives.



"When little people are overwhelmed by big emotions, its our job to share our calm, not join their chaos."

-L.R. Knost

Sources

Beyond COVID 19: Supporting Children, Families, & Staff to Reintegrate to the New Normal. <https://www.earlychildhoodwebinars.com/webinars/beyond-covid-19-preparing-now-to-support-preschool-children-to-transition-back-to-the-classroom-by-barbara-kaiser/>

Returning to Normal After COVID 19. <https://kidshelpline.com.au/parents/issues/returning-normal-after-covid-19>

What Comes Next: Back to Child Care Following Shelter In Place. <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3413-what-comes-next-back-to-child-care-following-shelter-in-place>

Why are people wearing masks? Why are people covering their faces? <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3211-why-are-people-wearing-masks-why-are-people-covering-their-faces>