

PEARL RIVER PARENT CONNECTION

A newsletter brought to you by PRSD School Clinicians

September 2020

Welcome Back To School

We hope everyone was able to make the best of their summer given the circumstances! Before the start of the school year, we wanted to provide parents with some tips and strategies to help your child(ren) transition back to school. As we know, the start of the school year will look different than any other school year we have had.

Tips To Prepare Children For The New School Year:

According to Melissa Butler, and Junlei Li featured in the article, *Making a Smooth Transition*, the following suggestions are made:

- Be honest and clear and direct about things.
- Talk through everything
- Try to talk about explicit procedures from last year (e.g. what door you walked in, who greeted them)
- Talk through how this fall will look different and we may not know which door they may walk in, but we know people will be there for support. Further, explaining to students that we may not be able to see supports faces well because of masks and that some things may look different than what they're used to.
- **Young children won't get bored by talking through the exact sequence of things they remember and talking through how they might be.**

Sample Script:

- "When talking through school, a parent can say honestly and in a way children will understand, "We know ___ will happen and we know you will see ___, but we don't know ___, we aren't certain about ___." And then, comforting children that we do know that ___ will drop them at school (or bus stop) and ___ will hug them when they come home from school."

Easing Back-to-School Transitions for Young Children — Amid COVID Uncertainty

- Be honest, clear, and direct. Talk to children about how they got to school last year, the door they went in, who was there to greet them, etc. Talk about the rituals they remember and how things might stay the same or look different this year.
- Talk explicitly about certainty and uncertainty, about what is likely to happen and what is still unknown. Learning to live with uncertainty and still be able to enjoy learning, friendship, and relationships is a key growth skill.
- Amid this time of stress, find 15 minutes, twice a week, to sit down with a child and just follow how they want to play a game. Children will be calmed and reassured by your attention.

How Can We Prepare Our Children For The Transition?

Dr. Becky Kennedy, a clinical psychologist specializing in anxiety, resilience, and parenting make the following suggestions:

Talk with your children about the upcoming transition. Give your children a story to understand what's changed and why this transition is happening.

Here's some sample scripts:

- *"The coronavirus cold that was jumping from person to person... we have made so many of the germs go away. So many of the germs have gone away that it is now safe to return to school."*
- *"We have been together for so long. Mommy and Daddy have been working from home, you have been learning and playing at home, and pretty soon, some of that is going to change. Mommy will be taking you to your school building, remember that one with the red bricks and yellow classroom? I will be dropping you off at the beginning of the day and always always always will come back at the end of the day. That's a big change from what we've gotten used to, huh?"*
- *"What questions or worries do you have? We can talk about them now or come find me when new ones come up."*

How Can We Predict and Prepare For Feelings

- We cope with difficult moments not by changing how we feel but by learning to regulate how we feel and regulation comes from understanding and allowing.
- In addition to checking in on your child's physical health and learning when she goes back to school, you should also keep an eye out for signs of stress and anxiety. COVID-19 may be impacting your child's mental health, and it's important to demonstrate that it's normal and OK to feel overwhelmed at times. When in doubt, empathy and support are the way to go.
- Whether at school or at home, caregivers can engage children in creative activities, such as playing and drawing, to help them express and communicate any negative feelings they may be experiencing in a safe and supportive environment. This helps children find positive ways to express difficult feelings such as anger, fear or sadness.

Some Sample Scripts:

All kids:

- "We've been home together for so many months! And pretty soon, you're going back to school... in the school building, with teachers and other kids and not with Mommy and Daddy. What a change, huh! Hm... what might that be like for you?" Pause. Allow your child time to consider.

Younger kids:

- "It's ok if it feels a bit... weird to say goodbye to Mommy when I drop you off. Our body tends to feel a bit weird when we do new things, and drop off at school will feel new again because we have been home together for so long!"
- "Let's practice our drop off routine before your first day of kindergarten: One hug, I say 'Mommy always comes back, see you soon!,' and then walk out, yes? Let's practice now..."

Older kids:

- "I wonder what it'll feel like to go back to school? What do you think will feel awesome or amazing... and what do you think will feel weird or sad?"
- "I know you're going to tell me, 'Mom! I know, geez!' but I'm going to tell you anyways: I'll be here when you get home from school."
- "It may feel weird to be apart after so many months of being together. If it does feel that way, that would make sense. It'll feel less weird each day."

Talk About What We Know and What We Don't Know

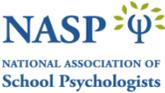
Here are some sample scripts:

- "This is one of those times where there are things we know and things we don't know. Let's go over them so we are all on the same page."
- "Things we know: School will start again in 10 days. Let's create a countdown and X out each day that passes so we know what to expect."
- "More things we know: Kids and teachers are expected to wear masks to keep leftover germs away. A teacher will take your temperature every day you get off the bus. You'll be asked to do more frequent hand-washing."
- "Ok, some things we don't know: We don't know if you'll be in a group with everyone in your class or if the teachers will divide the class into smaller groups. Another thing: We don't know if your soccer team will play this fall."
- "Here's another thing we do know: I will always be here for you. You can tell me how school feels and I will listen and try my best to understand. I will be here every night when you go to bed and every morning when you wake up."
- "It's hard not to know things. For adults too."

Creating a Supportive Space At Home

<h3>Tips for Surviving Remote School</h3> <p>Passwords "Write down every single website, user login, and password. Post these prominently, and take a picture to keep on your phone." --Devorah in Wired Magazine</p>	<h3>Communicate with teachers</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Is an older sibling helping younger ones during school time?▪ Has your child been stressed?▪ Is there a time of day that's proving hard?▪ Is there a conflict with timing between your work and something your child is expected to do? <p>Let the teacher know.</p>
<p>Movement is crucial</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Walk or go outside or dance before sitting down to work▪ Stretch in between classes▪ Hydration and snacks!▪ Try: pushups, jumping jacks, running around the block	<p>Self Care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Sit in your car or somewhere private & call a friend▪ Take a walk by yourself▪ Jam to your pandemic anthem▪ Let something go. Everything will be OK.
<p>Troubleshoot Distractions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Headphones can help▪ Remove potential distractions in the environment (ours are legos, cats and smartphones)	<p>Remember Your relationship with your kids is more important than being perfect at remote school.</p> <p>Devorah Heitner, PhD author of <i>Screenwise</i></p>

September is Suicide Awareness Month



Preventing Youth Suicide: Tips for Parents and Educators

If you or someone you know is suicidal, get help immediately via 911, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK or the Crisis Text Line (text "HOME" to 741741).

Suicide is preventable. Youth who are contemplating suicide frequently give warning signs. Do not be afraid to ask about suicidal thoughts. Never take warning signs lightly or promise to keep them secret.

Risk Factors



- Hopelessness
- Non-suicidal self injury (e.g., cutting)
- Mental illness, especially severe depression, but also post traumatic stress, ADHD, and substance abuse
- History of suicidal thinking and behavior
- Prior suicide among peers or family members
- Interpersonal conflict, family stress/dysfunction
- Presence of a firearm in the home

Warning Signs



- Suicidal threats in the form of direct (e.g., "I want to die") and indirect (e.g. "I wish I could go to sleep and not wake up") statements
- Suicide notes, plans, online postings
- Making final arrangements
- Preoccupation with death
- Giving away prized possessions
- Talking about death
- Sudden unexplained happiness
- Increased risk taking
- Heavy drug/alcohol use

What to Do



- Remain calm, nonjudgmental and listen.
- Ask directly about suicide (e.g., "Are you thinking about suicide?").
- Focus on your concern for their well-being
- Avoid being accusatory (e.g., don't say, "You aren't going to do anything stupid are you?").
- Reassure them that there is help; they will not feel like this forever.
- Provide constant supervision. Do not leave the youth alone.
- Remove means for self-harm, especially firearms.
- **Get help!** Never agree to keep suicidal thoughts a secret. Tell an appropriate caregiving adult. Parents should seek help from school or community mental health resources as soon as possible. School staff should take the student to a school-employed mental health professional.

Reminders for Parents



After a school notifies a parent of their child's risk for suicide and provides referral information, parents must:

- **Continue to take threats seriously.** Follow through is important even after the child calms down or informs the parent "they didn't mean it."
- **Access school supports.** If parents are uncomfortable with following through on referrals, they can give the school psychologist permission to contact the referral agency, provide referral information, and follow up on the visit.
- **Maintain communication with school.** After an intervention, the school will also provide follow-up supports. Your communication will be crucial to ensuring that the school is the safest, most comfortable place possible for your child.

For additional guidance, visit www.nasponline.org/suicideprevention.
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For more information, please review the following resources:

<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/20/07/making-smooth-transition>

<https://childmind.org/backtoschool/>

Fighting the Big Virus: Trink, Sam, and the Littletown Work Together Read Aloud:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_UwPYexEbU

<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/20/07/making-smooth-transition>

<https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-protect-your-familys-mental-health-face-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>

<https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/supporting-your-childs-mental-health-during-covid-19-school-return>