

# Return to School and College

## A Guide to Supporting Young People's Anxieties for Parents & Caregivers

The Children and Young People's Wellbeing team at Centre 33 deliver targeted, evidence-based interventions to support young people to overcome anxiety.

Using our knowledge, we have designed this brief guide to offer tips for parents and carers in how to support the young people in your life to navigate and manage these challenges.

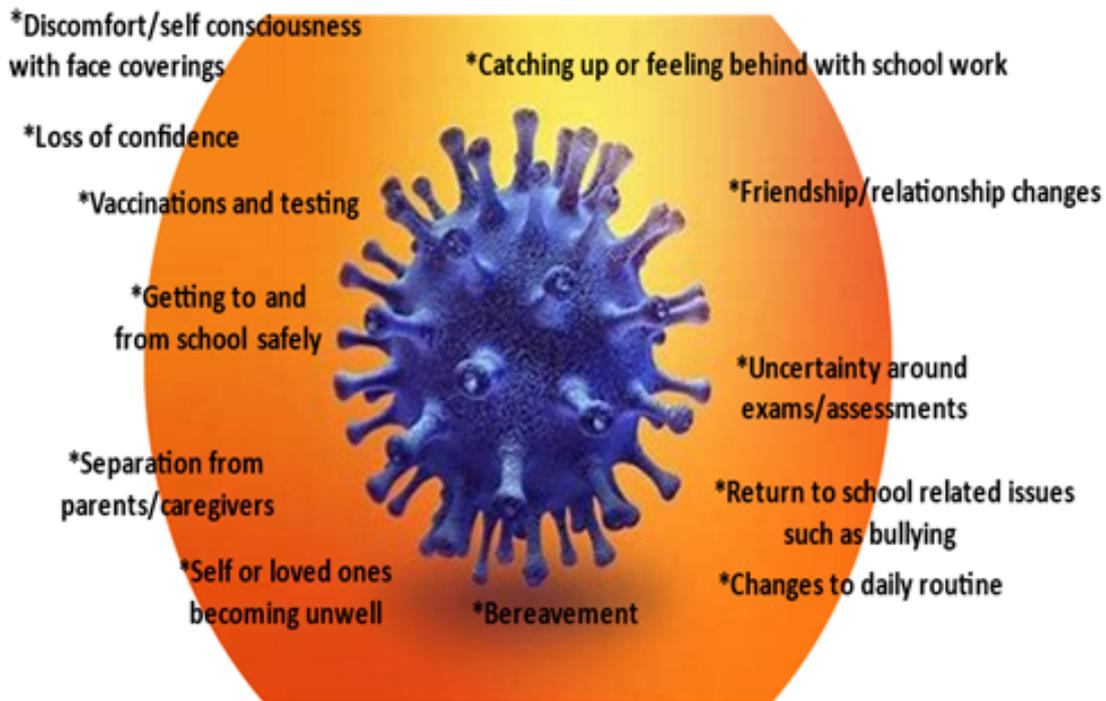
We have included advice on further sources of support too.



Whilst the end of lockdown may be good news for some students, many are understandably feeling worried about going back to school or college.

Research by Barnados (2020) showed that after the last lockdown almost 25% parents of school students said that their children had expressed concerns about their going back to school.

Commonly shared worries expressed by young people about returning to face-to-face education include:



Many students returning to school on March 8th, are facing further changes to school or college environments and routines which may be adding to existing anxieties.



**These include:**

- **Introduction of Lateral Flow Testing**
- **Increased use of face coverings amongst school staff and students**
- **Altered and unclear assessment processes**

These new adaptations to 'normal' school life, along with other worries outlined above, will be unsettling for many. Though they will hopefully quickly become routine, heightened levels of anxiety may be experienced in the early stages.

Young people may be telling you that they are anxious, or you may spot it in their behaviour, for example they are sleeping badly, seem irritable or speak of their own physical symptoms such as heart racing, appetite disturbances or nervous fidgeting behaviour. At an extreme some students become so anxious they may want to avoid returning to school.



## Tip 1: Keep Calm

Anxiety can be alarming and distressing to both experience and observe. By taking steps to **calm** and **regulate** your own emotions and physical state, you will be more able to calm and regulate your young person and prevent feelings and sensations from escalating.

Remind your young person that their **anxiety** is completely **normal** but that sometimes, a bit like a faulty smoke alarm, it can alert us to danger that is not actually as threatening as it may feel. Everyone experiences anxiety in their life, it is a natural response to stress.

Although anxiety can feel very frightening, it is **not** physically **harmful** or dangerous.

## Tip 2: Be a listening ear



**Encourage** your young person to talk about their anxiety and worries.

When a young person is talking about how they feel, **listen** carefully and try and pay full attention to what they are communicating.

**Repeat** back to the young person what you have heard and check with them that you have understood them correctly.

These things will help a young person feel listened to and will help you to **understand** their experience.



## Tip 3: Validate and Empathise

Remind your young person that you are there for them and that they are **not alone** with their feelings.

Acknowledge and **accept** whatever feelings that they are having and avoid minimising or jumping straight in to making them feel better.

**Empathise** and accept that their experience is troubling and difficult, even if it seems disproportionate or illogical.

Keep the **focus** on them and their worries.



## Tip 4: Practical Strategies

**Notice** any physical manifestations of anxiety in your young person:

**(rapid breathing/chest pain/headaches/upset stomach/pins and needles)**

Remind them that those bodily sensations maybe uncomfortable but are not dangerous.

Help the person gain control over these feelings by switching their attention away from their physical sensations through **distraction**.

Help your young person to **regulate** themselves by encouraging them to focus on things that they can see, hear, touch, smell and taste around them. This helps calm the mind and body and bring them back to the present.

Openly ask your young person **questions** that can break down their worries into manageable pieces.

You could create a **plan** for how you can put things in place to manage worries and anxious thoughts together.



## Tip 5: You are important too!

It is not easy supporting an anxious young person that you love and care about. You also may be experiencing your own **worries** and facing additional **stresses** due to the pandemic.

Many of the wellbeing strategies that we advise for young people can also be used for yourself, particularly ones regarding 'self-care'. By 'self-care' we mean prioritising **eating** and **sleeping well**, taking regular **exercise**, including mindful practices such as **breathing** and **relaxation** in your daily routine, **connecting** with supportive others and creating **time** for yourself.

By taking care of yourself you will be able to model to your young person about how 'self-care' can positively influence wellbeing, both theirs and your own.

### ● **Further support for parents**



#### **Young Minds**

[www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-helpline/](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-helpline/)

#### **Anna Freud Centre**

[www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/resources/supporting-children-with-anxiety-tools-for-parents/](http://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/resources/supporting-children-with-anxiety-tools-for-parents/)

### ● **Further support for young people**

Refer to your **school** and **college** websites for up-to-date guidance on student mental health support services.

**Centre 33** - [www.centre33.org.uk/](http://www.centre33.org.uk/)

**Kooth** - [www.kooth.com/](http://www.kooth.com/)

**The Mix** - [www.themix.org.uk/](http://www.themix.org.uk/)

**Keep Your Head** - [www.keep-your-head.com/](http://www.keep-your-head.com/)

Contact your **GP**