



Supporting emotional well-being when returning to the classroom

For some learners, returning to the classroom will be an exciting time of seeing friends again and settling into a routine. For others, going back to school may cause anxiety and worry.

As schools reopen, we have an opportunity to reflect on what we have learnt while teaching remotely, the new strategies we can implement in the classroom, and how we can carefully support everyone as we return to school.

Acknowledge

You may feel anxious yourself about returning to the classroom. Make sure you have time and space to share your feelings with your colleagues.

Look after your own mental well-being. Recognise when you are working too hard or too long to help you to achieve balance and avoid burnout. Acknowledge the potential time constraints you and your learners are facing and be realistic about what you can achieve. You will still have the same high standards for teaching and learning.

Acknowledging that these times are unprecedented can be helpful in making sure you are not pushing yourself or your learners too hard.

Communicate

You or your school will probably have been in regular contact with learners during this time. This will help you to identify those who are particularly worried about coming back to school and open a dialogue with them.

Make sure you (or another member of staff they trust) are available to talk about their worries before they come back to school.

Listen

When you return to school, some learners may find it challenging to transition from the learning routine they have become used to at home.

Consider how you can support learners who may struggle with tiredness, concentration and structure. It may not be realistic to expect your learners to settle straight back into the rigorous timetable of the school day, so make time for learners to pause, speak to their friends, move around and refocus their attention gradually.

Listen to your learners to find out what worked for them and how they adapted their time and focus throughout the day.



Engage

Speaking to parents or carers is a powerful way to encourage a good home–school relationship and is even more important at this time.

Ask parents about how their child has been studying at home and let them know how you plan to transition back to the classroom. Remember that this should be a two-way communication. Sometimes it may be easier for parents to speak with their children about routines and the expectations of going back to school.

Identify

Some learners will have been very engaged with lessons while learning remotely. This group of learners may feel well prepared and ready to return to the classroom.

However, some learners may not have had access to technology and appropriate study space during this time. They may feel anxious about gaps in their learning and fear that they will not catch up. Address these fears by differentiating your lessons effectively.



One way to do this is to reflect on the work you set when your school was closed and the work that your learners submitted. This can help you to identify which groups of learners may need more intervention initially.

Share

A good way to help your learners to feel more prepared is to share your plan for the rest of the term or semester.

Outline the important skills they will practise and develop, and how you plan to assess these. Learners will also find it helpful to know the order of topics so that they can seek out good resources to prepare and revise content.

Reflect

This is a unique opportunity to adapt our teaching practices and to invite our learners to help us in this.

Look at the work you set when school was closed, and reflect with them on whether any techniques seemed to work more effectively and why this may be.

Then think about how you can include these techniques in future lessons. For example, can you let your learners choose from different ways to undertake an assignment? Can learners show you in a paragraph what you would have asked for in an essay? Can you make use of technology for feedback?

Reflection can also be useful when addressing the emotional well-being of your students. Ask them to tell you about what they liked or did not like about learning from home, and ask them to share how they felt in a safe way such as written or video reflective pieces.

