



Teaching and learning when school returns: considerations for primary-age children

We know many of you are back in school, while others are about to return. We also know others are still waiting for a confirmed date.

This guide provides teachers of primary-age children with support, guidance and suggestions to help as they transition back to the classroom, either part or full time. Our thanks to the teachers who shared their ideas and suggestions.

Encourage talk about being back at school

Young children are likely to have concerns about being back at school, so it is important to create a safe environment where it is okay to talk about a number of things:

- Talk about the new rules and routines for both class and outside spaces:
 - discuss the reasons for each rule, what is the same as before and what is different.
 - take them on a tour around school to show the changes and demonstrate how to follow the rules.
 - use images and signs as a way of displaying and reminding learners of the rules and routines.
 - create a video demonstrating the new rules and routines to share with the children and parents before they return.
- Use traffic lights, smiley face cards, or gestures to get a quick snapshot of how children are feeling at any one time.
- Use online quiz platforms and tools such as Kahoot! with older primary-age children to allow them to articulate their feelings anonymously. You can then use their answers as a forum for discussion.
- Discuss concerns children may have by using fictional characters, like a puppet or a story to stimulate discussion. You could also use role-play where one child is assigned a worry and other children reassure them.
- Have ongoing strategies for dealing with worries and sharing concerns, such as a box that children can post their concerns in anonymously.
- Consider the need to support parents and carers during their child's initial period back in the classroom.

Prioritise wellbeing

There is no need to rush back to formal lessons or assessment within the first days of returning to school. Instead, you can use informal assessment opportunities to see where children are in their learning journey:



- Make their wellbeing and social and emotional learning your priority and be ready to adapt your planning.
- Many children will be excited to see their friends so give them more time to socialise in the first week. This will help to prepare them for concentrating on formal learning and will help you to understand differences in experiences.
- If children have been learning using screens, offer the opportunity to continue this or offer a blended approach.
- Give children time to talk about feelings and experiences in different ways, such as circle-time opportunities and one-to-one time.
- Invite parents to let you know about their child's experiences, particularly if they have been directly affected by illness or bereavement and may need extra support.
- If your class has questions around the pandemic, use stimulus material or resources to discuss their thoughts.
- Plan initially for short bursts of learning with breaks between to re-build concentration skills. Re-establish skills such as concentration, turn taking, listening, sharing and social development using board and card games as resources.
- Remind them of the quiet area in the classroom where they can go to if things get too much for them.
- Provide activities outside the class as well as inside, especially physical activities if you can.
- Offer the opportunity for children to spend time with their siblings during the day if they want to, as being away from them may feel unsettling at first.



- Remember that children may initially get tired towards the end of the day, and plan your activities accordingly.
- Do not forget the extra support that children who are new to your school will need.

Share lockdown and at-home experiences

- Share your experiences of lockdown to help you rebuild your relationships with children.
- Where applicable, share experiences of what it was like to be taught at home virtually. Find out more about which online programmes the children enjoyed using to support their learning and why.
- Consider how you could incorporate the digital programmes and tools that children used at home, to enhance the teaching and learning experience at school.
- Incorporate some short free-talk times between activities.
- Discuss the best and the worst things about lockdown, including how children felt, as well as what they did. For example, using circle time, show and tell (e.g. sharing photos, things that children made).
- Use drawing, painting or music to represent the lockdown experience creatively.
- Create and display posters to represent the lockdown experience. For example, a collage of photos, pictures from magazines and drawings, a memory poster recording written responses in given categories (e.g. something I made, someone I helped).
- Create a time capsule of experiences and feelings to look back on and talk about as time goes on, to help children to better understand and manage change.
- Allow children to share the new skills they have learnt while being away from school. They could highlight their digital skills through creating podcasts, animations and short films.

Work on relationships

Children will have had different experiences of interacting with others during lockdown. Those who have experienced isolation might take time to rebuild relationships. The following ideas will provide structured opportunities for practising and discussing social interactions:

- Create a piece of collaborative art and design, for example, a classroom 'mural', with each child painting a different element on paper to cut out and display.
- Sing together – try songs with different parts or creating new class actions for a known song.
- Consider planning and delivering joint story-telling activities with groups of younger children using puppets so they work together.
- Remind children of each other's interests and preferences, for example, by asking them to create a collage of pictures representing their favourite things.
- Talk about social behaviours, for example, using puppets and role-play to discuss scenarios, such as someone feeling left out of play during break time.
- Use social stories to support children who are finding it more difficult to rebuild relationships.
- With children who are nervous or scared in talking to their peers face to face, use devices with video conferencing to allow them to speak to others, in the same room or a different room.
- Provide team games and challenges – these can have minimal physical content, for example, finding hidden objects in an outside space, or playing a mime game such as 'Guess how I'm feeling'.

Further reading and resources

Cambridge Primary Global Perspectives is made up of content or 'Challenges' that can be used to develop skills like collaboration and reflection in young learners. You can find these materials on the **Cambridge Primary** website where you can filter by stage, skill and topic. There is no need to tell us you are using them; if your school is a Cambridge Primary school these materials are yours to use and adapt.

We have created – and curated – **materials** that support teachers across the Cambridge Pathway from Primary through to Advanced as they move back to the school building. These resources cover all aspects, including social and emotional issues and the wellbeing of both children and adults.

In addition, these free resources (all external links) may be useful:

- **My Hero is you, Storybook for Children on COVID-19** – a pdf book in multiple languages from the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings.
- **Coronavirus and Kids** – resources from Save the Children on how to talk about coronavirus, deal with extended school closures and more.
- **Coronavirus** – a free information book explaining coronavirus to children, illustrated by *The Gruffalo* illustrator Axel Scheffler.
- **Caring for Each Other** – Sesame Street content on Covid-19 for very young children.