

# Helping Your Family Prepare for Return to School - *During the Covid 19 Pandemic!*

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As September approaches, many of you may have questions and concerns about what the return to school will look like and how we can best prepare our children. While we may have some unanswered questions, there are many things we can do to improve their transition to this new way of learning. There is just under a month to go - so start now! The sooner we help them (and us) prepare, the better!

## **Messaging**

- Children often turn to adults to determine how they should react to a certain situation. They are ALWAYS listening and what they hear can shape how they feel about returning to school
  - Be mindful of what you say in front of them and how you discuss the potential return to school
- Be positive about school and emphasize the elements your child will enjoy - ie seeing their friends
- Encourage them to ask questions and take part in these discussions

## **Hand Washing**

- Review and practice proper [hand washing techniques](#)
  - Consider doing it with washable paint so they can see the spots that are often missed
- Ensure they understand the importance of regular hand washing
  - Discuss the [most important times to wash hands](#)

## **Learning to be Comfortable in a Mask**

- It will be mandatory for students grades 4 and up to wear masks. While it is not mandatory for younger students to wear masks, they are still encouraged to do so
- Size and comfort will be key factors in your child's integration to wearing a mask. Make sure to try out different types of masks and see which are most comfortable for your children BEFORE they return to school.
- We have time! Start getting them used to masks now to make sure their first day is not overwhelming. Normalize mask wearing NOW
  - Take them out in public to see that others are wearing masks. Discuss people's masks and what you like about the different styles
  - Practice wearing masks with your children and show them that you are comfortable wearing them too
  - Help them be comfortable in their masks by slowly increasing their mask time over the next few weeks
    - Eg. start with 15 minutes, then increase to 30 minutes, 1 hour, 2 hours, and so on
    - If they are having trouble, provide encouragement and small rewards for positive mask use
  - For little ones, you can encourage them to put masks on stuffed animals or other favourite toys
  - Draw pictures of animals/characters wearing masks
- Get them excited about their own masks
  - Allow them to pick out masks they like - there are many different styles for kids of all ages
  - Decorate masks as a family (themes, self expression, competitions can all increase engagement)
  - Provide lots of compliments and praise of their choices and their styles
  - Ensure masking is seen as a valuable contribution to society
- Review [mask etiquette](#)
  - No sharing
  - Send multiple masks in case one is dirty or lost - let them know where you will put their extra masks i.e. their backpack or cubby.

- Label your masks - children will lose them and you don't want them going home with someone else's mask!
- Discuss what to do with a mask that they are no longer using - ie leave in paper bag
- Encourage them to compliment and give praise to others on their masks and unique styles

### **Physical Distancing**

- Discuss your family rules and comforts surrounding Covid-19 and physical distancing
- Reassure them that it is okay to ask someone politely to give them more space
- Explain that their comforts may be different from someone's else's and that we must respect others' wishes
- Review appropriate and inappropriate physical distance (2 meters is the recommended distance)
- Reassure them that being less physically close does not mean that they are prohibited from having fun or socializing - we just need to adjust the way we interact

### **Family Conversations**

- Ask questions and listen when they express concerns
  - Validate their concerns and answer their questions as best as you can
  - If you don't have an answer right away that's okay- research it together
- Acknowledge that this is a unique situation and that you too are experiencing it for the first time
- Teach them [how to sneeze or cough into their elbow](#) and start practicing at home
- Try to engage them in conversations "What will going back to school look like?"
  - Address the similarities and differences in the routines that they will face in school
  - Normalize the changes and reassure them that these are positive changes meant to keep everyone safe
- Discuss some things they can look forward to i.e. seeing friends, teachers, exciting activities
- Help them get excited to return to school
  - Take them shopping with you for back to school supplies/clothes - this will help them get used to being out around others in masks and will also get them excited for the new school year
  - Praise the educators and reassure your children that they will have their best interests at heart

### **Sick Days**

- Please do not send children to school if they are ill
- Rules around children going to school sick will be more strict this year - and they should be. Children with Covid-19 can present with mild symptoms and it will be difficult for you to know if this is covid or a regular cough/cold.
- Learn about your school board's policy around student illness and requirements prior to return to school
- Contact your health care provider for guidance if you have any concerns

### **Mental Health**

- For some additional resources in mental health and return to school, please [click here](#) for an article written by Kids Helpline

*Be kind to your school staff and educators. There are going to be a lot of changes for everyone. Be patient and try to open dialogue with teachers and staff to ensure a safe and healthy return to school.*