

# Tips for Preparing to Return to the Classroom

Making transitions between schedules, activities and routines can be challenging at times for most children and teens. Accepting unexpected changes can be exceptionally challenging for children with special needs. If your child or teen is going back to a physical school in the fall, use these tips to support the upcoming transitions.

## Prepare for the transition/change

- **Start preparing your child/teen for the upcoming transition** back to school by getting back into routines such as:
  - Setting a realistic bedtime and following through with structured evening routines
  - Organizing backpack/computer/books/notebooks the night before
  - Setting up homework or virtual learning stations
  - Completing structured morning routines
- **Consider requesting a recorded “virtual tour”** or pictures of the school, classrooms, lockers and additional relevant settings throughout the campus.
- **Consider requesting pictures**, recorded video, or bios of teachers for your child or teen to “get to know teachers”.
- **Consider driving by your child or teen’s school** to practice the morning routine and drop off policies provided by your school, as well as view the campus. Pro Tip: Bring the pictures and videos to review when in the parking lot of the school, as needed.
- **Arrange virtual “play dates”** or a socially distant peer interaction with a familiar peer (e.g., families can drive by the school together at a scheduled time and “pair” the school visit with a small peer interaction – waving to each other and seeing each other in masks) before school starts – research shows the presence of a familiar peer during

school transitions can improve children’s academic and emotional adjustment ([www.hopkinsmedicine.org](http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org)).

- **Separate your feelings/worries** from your child/teen’s - you might be nervous about the transition back to school, but your child/teen will need to see you model calm behavior, encouragement and confidence.
- **Create a supportive and nurturing environment** and respond positively to questions and expressions of your child/teen’s feelings and inquiries.

## Set expectations with visual supports and transitional cues

- **Consider using visual schedules**, checklists or first/then visuals for morning and evening routines.
- **Consider using visual schedules** or checklists for the school day/week (e.g., a visual calendar that marks the days of the week for virtual learning vs. at school with socially distanced learning), schedules can vary from pictures, to words, to checklists or digital/online schedules to accommodate your child/teen’s developmental level.

- **Consider visual or verbal transitional cues** to prepare your child for the transition in routine (e.g., keeping the instruction objective “3 more days, then school starts” -or- “10 more minutes, then car to school”).
- **If needed, use first/then language** to provide transitional cues (e.g., “First car, then iPad”).
- **Use a visual timer** that shows the passage of time so your child can see an activity coming to the end.
- **Determine if there are skills your child needs** to learn beforehand, like tolerating stimuli such as a face mask throughout the day (e.g., practice wearing the face mask more often at home with increasing intervals of time or seeing others with face masks on such as their teachers/peers).
- **Consider starting with transitions** from preferred-to-preferred tasks and then move from preferred to-non-preferred tasks over a period of time (e.g., consider a ‘transition schedule’ 2 weeks before school starts with increasing the daily structure and completion of tasks over a period of time).

### Practice transitions and new skills

- **Practice through role play** and modeling at home social interaction with peers and social distancing (e.g., role play new forms of greetings that do not require physical contact, role play waiting in line on visual markers and remain socially distant from peers).
- **Role play healthy habits** such as sneezing into your elbow, using tissues, washing hands, getting your temperature checked.

- **Consider using video modeling** to support learning new skills and expectations (e.g., [videos on wearing face masks](#)).

### Reward what you want to see

- **Use praise or positive reinforcement** when your child/teen transitions and follows the routine/schedule
- **Consider using a reward system** as a visual aide to support motivation and compliance, your child can exchange points/tokens for rewards

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Whether you take advantage of informal supports, such as family or friends, or more formal sources, such as counseling or other services, it is something to consider this year. Watch [this video](#) from the CDC on stress and anxiety with COVID-19.

Taking care of yourself and accepting support can help you have more patience for the change in schedule, develop skills to better teach your child, and gather more tools to be a collaborative partner in your child’s education.

### Helpful Resources:

[www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org)

[www.hopkinsmedicine.org](http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org)

[CDC](#)

**Need more ideas or help?** Schedule a consultation with Rethink’s behavior experts today!

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