

# Back to school



**A Guide for Parents and  
Carers**

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# Welcome

As we create this booklet, we realise that many of you will have been on an emotional rollercoaster over the last few months. Covid-19 and the UK lockdown, which started on 23rd March 2020, has completely changed our everyday lives. Many parents have had to adjust to home-schooling, working from home and limiting their children's time outdoors. For parents of children with additional needs, the difficulties may have been even greater. Some children may have adjusted well to learning at home, and may even have thrived without the additional stress of school and constant social interactions, other young people may have found this time incredibly difficult.

You are likely to have lots of different thoughts and emotions about your child returning to school, perhaps you will welcome the routine, or maybe you are anxious and worried that your child will struggle to cope.



This pack has been produced to help you manage your child's emotions, provide strategies and tips to support their transition back into school life, and to explore how to maintain your own wellbeing.

There are also separate booklets available for primary school children, and young people age 11-18.

# Communication

Your child may struggle to communicate their thoughts and feelings, and you may notice an increase in difficult behaviours when your young person becomes anxious or worried about returning to school. As parents, it is important to prepare your child for what will happen, and to help them find a way to explore their emotions.

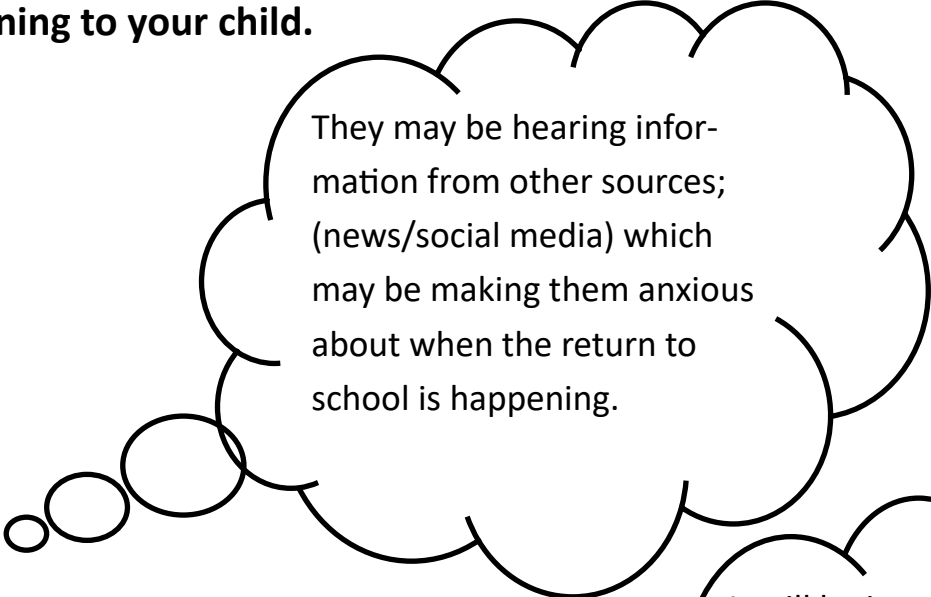
We have included some information in this pack to support you in communicating effectively with your child at this time.

There are different pages for each topic.

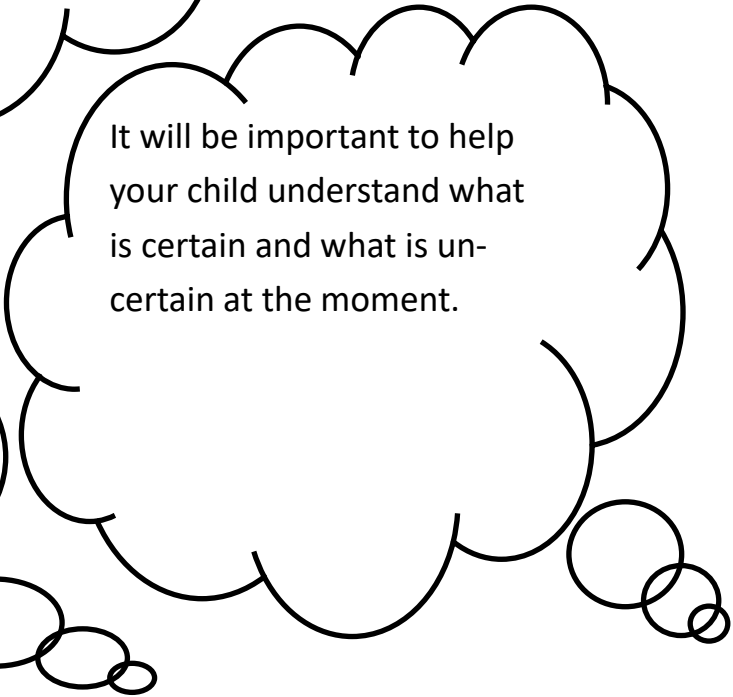
1. Supporting your child's understanding about the return to school
2. Supporting your child to communicate about feelings, emotions and worries with their child
3. Supporting your child to reconnect with friends
4. Supporting your child to communicate with you about school and home
5. Developing a Communication Passport



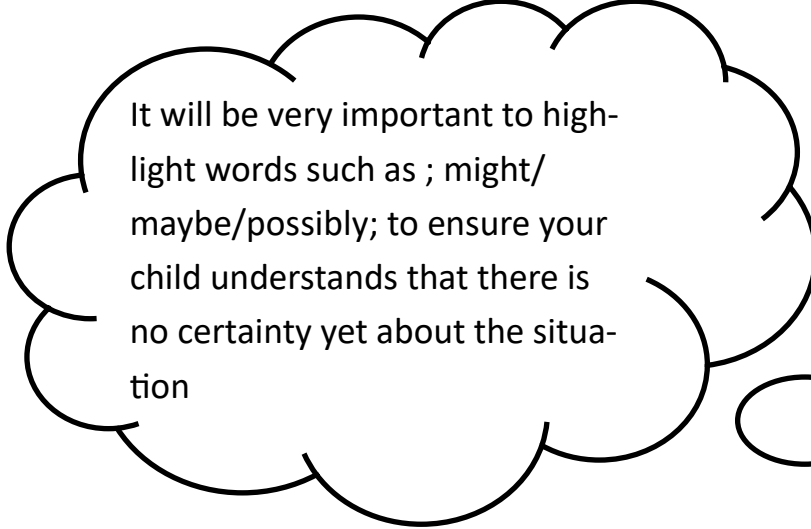
**In order to support your child's understanding of the transition back to school; it will be very important for you to find ways to communicate what is happening to your child.**



They may be hearing information from other sources; (news/social media) which may be making them anxious about when the return to school is happening.



It will be important to help your child understand what is certain and what is uncertain at the moment.



It will be very important to highlight words such as ; might/ maybe/possibly; to ensure your child understands that there is no certainty yet about the situation

We have included a “social Story” which you can read to your child. We know it is very helpful for children to hear the same words repeated many times and also for them to be able to read and see the same information as well.

This is a very helpful way of communicating to your child; especially if they are asking the same question repeatedly.

It will be most helpful for your child if you use the same words on the social story every-time they ask you about going back to school. It will be helpful if everyone in the family is also using the same words to talk to them about going back to school.

# Routines

Most people will have changed their routines considerably since lockdown.

Your child may be going to bed later and getting up later as well.

Your child may be spending much more time than usual on a phone or playing computer games.

It will be really helpful for them to start to get back into more of a school routine a few weeks before the schools go back.

Some children find it really helpful to have pictures of different parts of their routine. We call this a **visual timetable**. We have included some information in this pack about how to set up a visual timetable.

You may already have been using a visual timetable during lockdown; it might help to use different colour borders round the symbols if you are starting to help your child to understand about going back to school.

Your child may well be anxious about the return to school. For some children it will be helpful for them to start using calendars so they can see when the return to school is happening

An example is shown below of how you might help your child see when the return to school is happening.

It will be important to show them that they can still do the activities they enjoy even after they go back to school.

	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Morning	Computer games	Computer games	School work at home	School work at home	School work at home	School work at home	School work at home
Afternoon	Go to the park	Watch a film	Computer games	Computer games	Computer games	Computer games	Computer games
Morning	Computer games	Computer games	SCHOOL	SCHOOL	SCHOOL	SCHOOL	SCHOOL
Afternoon	Park	Garden	Computer games	Computer games	Computer games	Computer games	Computer games

# Using visual supports

Your child may find it difficult to understand and prepare for changes to routine. You may have already worked hard to help him/her understand that there is no school and that activities outside your home are cancelled.

Going back to school after a long break is another important transition point.

Being prepared for change can help children to understand what is expected and to manage anxiety.

## Using a Visual Calendar

A visual calendar might be made using photographs, symbols, pictures or written words. This will depend on your child's understanding.

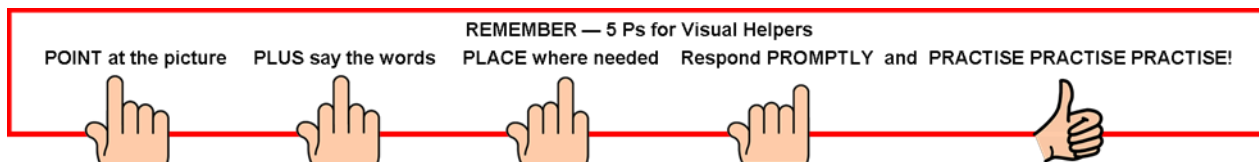


	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Morning	Computer games	Computer games	School work at home	School work at home	School work at home	School work at home	School work at home
Afternoon	Go to the park	Watch a film	Computer games	Computer games	Computer games	Computer games	Computer games
Morning	Computer games	Computer games	SCHOOL 9-12	SCHOOL 9-12	SCHOOL 9-12	SCHOOL 9-12	SCHOOL 9-12
Afternoon	Park	Garden	Computer games	Computer games	Computer games	Computer games	Computer games

Using a calendar **now** will help your child get used to seeing what is happening in the week. You could try one with pictures of home and some activities you will do everyday. That means when you do start introducing 'school' in advance, your child will already understand what the calendar means.

You may already have been using a visual timetable during lockdown; it might help to use different colour borders/backgrounds round the symbols if you are starting to help your child to understand about going back to school.

It will be important to show children that we can still do activities we enjoy after we go back to school.



## How to use Visuals—The 5 Ps for Visual Helpers

**POINT:** Make a clear POINTing gesture to direct your child’s attention to the Timetable.

**PLUS:** PLUS say the word to match, have special words for when you check the Timetable, for example, “let’s check,” then use simple language to name the activity, “park.”

**PLACE:** Have the Visual Timetable in the PLACE you need it for instance on the wall of the living room at your child’s height.

**PROMPTLY:** Show the Timetable picture then act PROMPTLY = point + say + do straightaway.

**PRACTISE:** Give your child plenty of PRACTICE with the Visual Timetable.

Other ideas:

- Some children might need to remove pictures to help them understand when an activity has finished. You could use a finished box or bag.



- Some children find lots of information hard to process and may find a calendar hard to understand. Try reducing the number of pictures. You could try a week-view calendar with only 'home' and 'school' on. You could use a visual timetable with a few pictures, or just show a single picture of home/school at the start of each day.





# Using emotion scales

Sharing emotions and describing feelings can be challenging and frustrating for you and your child. Some children find it hard to understand their own emotions and therefore talk about them, some may find it difficult to use the right words or know how to communicate these in a way that others can understand. Using Emotions Scales can be helpful to help young people to identify and share their feelings, and can also be helpful to guide others to know how to help.

The 5 Point Scales™ can be used to help the young person and other people recognise and share how they feel, as well as give strategies to try to manage these reactions.

Developing a scale:

- Use one scale for a specific emotion (e.g. worried OR excited).
- Try to develop this with your young person (if they are able), to ensure shared understanding, ownership, accuracy and useful strategies. The more specific and personal the scale is to your child, the more effective it will be.
- Break this emotion down into 5 steps, 1 is neutral (or relaxed), 5 is the most extreme (e.g. meltdown). It may be easiest to start with the outer numbers first (e.g. 1 and 5) as these are usually the easiest to identify. Think about and discuss specific situations or examples where your child experiences each step of the emotion.
- Add visuals for each step. These could be emojis or related to their favourite characters, or drawings. This will support understanding and interest.
- Add to the “what can I/others do” column together. Add simple, quick and practical ideas that your young person or others can do that may help them to regulate their emotional response or arousal. Consider your child’s ‘thinking’ ability at each step (e.g. as you move up the scale, thinking gets harder, so more practical, distraction or sensory strategies may be more useful).
- Less is more: Keep it simple for your young person and others to understand.

5		freaking out panic
4		really worried
3		worried nervous anxious
2		a little worried
1		okay

Using the scale:

- Share with others: (at least) a copy at home, at school (with a teacher) and in your child’s bag.
- Model and practice using the scale with your child. Other family members can get involved too.
- Check in with them at various times of the day. Introduce it when they are fairly calm/positive). You can establish this whilst at home.
- Follow their lead: They may use to communicate using the numbers, colours, visual, character names, or descriptions. Go with whatever they find easiest and share this information with others.
- When the return to school, it might be useful to identify specific times of the day where a member of staff can check in with your child, using the scale (e.g. first thing, before/after break, lunchtime, etc.)

	How I feel	What I can do
5	 I need some help!	<input type="checkbox"/> Ask to go visit Mrs. Holland <input type="checkbox"/> Ask to take a break/use therapy <input type="checkbox"/> Hold on to Luke Skywalker (if he is here) <input type="checkbox"/> Take 4 or 5 deep breaths
4	 I'm really upset.	<input type="checkbox"/> Ask to go visit Mrs. Holland <input type="checkbox"/> Ask to take a break/use therapy <input type="checkbox"/> Hold on to Luke Skywalker (if he is here) <input type="checkbox"/> Take 4 or 5 deep breaths
3	 I've got a problem.	<input type="checkbox"/> Let a teacher know that you have a problem and need some help <input type="checkbox"/> Play with your squishy thing <input type="checkbox"/> Hold on to Luke Skywalker (if he is here) <input type="checkbox"/> Take 4 or 5 deep breaths
2	 Things are pretty good.	<input type="checkbox"/> Play with my squishy thing <input type="checkbox"/> Think of my favorite things <input type="checkbox"/> Say "I'm going to be O.K." to yourself <input type="checkbox"/> Take 3 or 4 deep breaths
1	 Feeling Great!	<input type="checkbox"/> Enjoy the feeling! <input type="checkbox"/> Have fun

# **Golden Rules** to support **your child's** **understanding**

- 1. Use pictures and written words to help your child to understand what is going to happen**
- 2. Use calendars and timetables to show when things are going to happen**
- 3. Use consistent language and emphasise the words that help your child understand there is uncertainty.**
- 4. Ensure that before the return to school they have lots of time to participate in the activities they enjoy.**
- 5. Be prepared to repeat the information lots of times**



# Helping your child to communicate with you about going back to school

Use some emoticons for happy/sad and neutral.



Use the pictures we have provided on the next sheet to get your child to sort how they are feeling about different aspects of home/school

Introduce the discussion by saying: “I thought it would be good be nice for us to talk a bit about what has been going well at home; and what you have found more difficult about being at home.”

Tell your child that if something is going well; they put it on the **smiley icon**. Sometimes well/sometimes not well on the **neutral icon** and if it is going badly put it on the **sad icon**.

Give your child the picture and say “how are things going at home with seeing your friends?” or “how are things going with doing your school work?”

- Try not to ask any other questions or make any judgement about where your child puts the different items.
- Once they have finished you can ask them if there is anything else that they want to add or anything they want to move.
- Comment in a neutral tone about where your child has put things; “I see things aren’t going well with your friends” “I see that things are going well with playing on the computer”
- You can then repeat this and ask them about what goes well at school.
- This is an opportunity for your child to let you know their worries about school.

Pictures for sorting activity for school/home



Need pictures of:

Home/school/friends/dinners/computer games/reading/work/teachers/  
garden/park/tv

A large, empty rectangular box with a dark red border, intended for drawing or pasting pictures related to the sorting activity.

# Friendships

Your child may be feeling a bit anxious about seeing their friends again.

They may have been keeping in touch via social media; or it may have been difficult for them to do this.

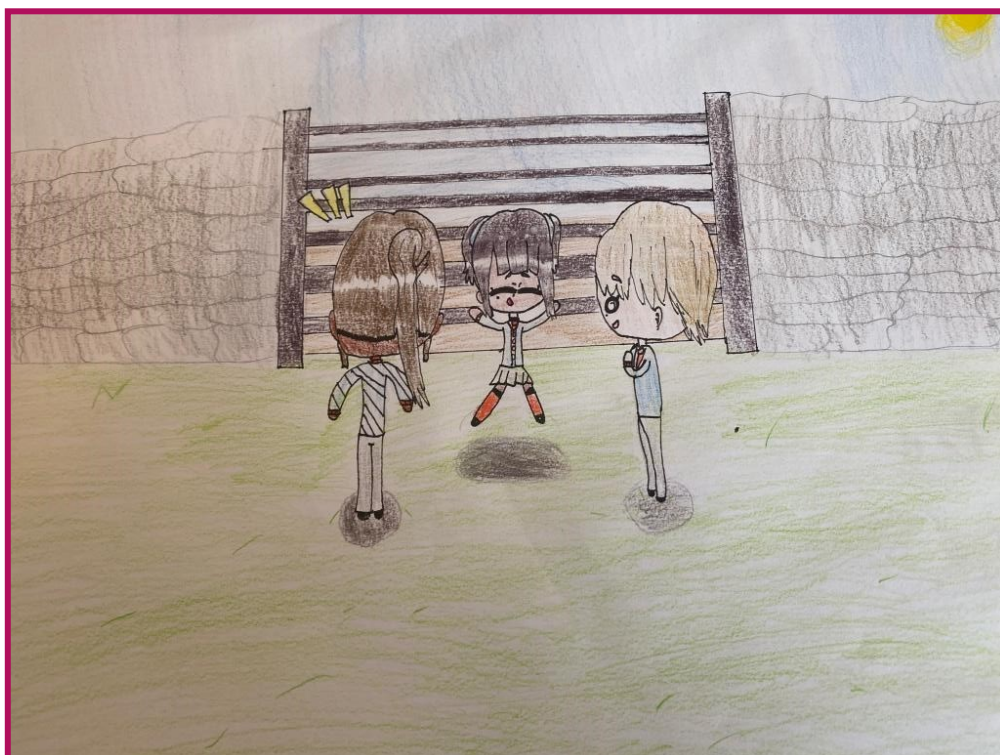
It will help their transition back to school if they start to make contact with their peers again

We have included a social story about friendships which might be helpful to read through with your child

It might be helpful for them to have a socially distanced meet with a friend in the park before they go back to school

It may be important for them to understand that they might not be able to do have the same kind of physical contact as they did previously.

(see social story on page 15)



# Social Stories

Social stories were developed by Carol Gray. <https://carolgraysocialstories.com/>

They are a helpful way of supporting children to understand new situations.

We enclose a number of template stories that you can use; it is really important that the stories are accurate; so please change them so that they are right for your child.

If you need any help with personalising the Social Stories; please contact the Speech and Language Therapy Team



# Seeing my friends again

Being at home has meant I have not been able to see my friends much

When I go back to school I will probably see most of my friends again

I may have different feelings about seeing my friends

I may have missed my friends and be happy and/or excited to see them

I may feel a bit shy; nervous or worried seeing my friends again

I may feel I have forgotten how to be with my friends

All of these feelings are okay

It is natural for it to feel a bit strange when I see my friends again

It is okay for me to get used being with my friends

When I see my friends I can ask them how they are. If I have missed them, I can tell them that

I can practice some different things I might say when I see them again in the classroom; at lunch time or at break time

My parents can help me practice what I might say

I will be really pleased if I say something nice or show I am interested in spending time with a friend.

I will soon get used to being with my friends and around children again

# Social Distancing

There is a virus which is making some people very unwell.

Important scientists have given everyone new rules which they think keeps everyone as safe and well as possible from the virus.

The scientists say we should try and stay 2 metres away from each other.

This will be really hard in school; but our teachers are working hard to work out the best way to do this.

My friends and I will have to find new ways to greet each other; we will need to greet each other from 2 metres apart.

This means we will be OK to do a wave or a thumbs up.

There will be probably lots of new ways that we will be able to let our friends know we are happy to see them





# Going back to school

We are going to be going back to school in

We have been at home since the middle of March

School might look and feel very different when we go back

We will probably be in smaller class groups

We might be in a different form from our friends.

We might start and end the day at a different time

We might be learning in different ways

Our teachers will tell us as much as they can about what will be different

Most of the children will be worried about what is different.

I will try and talk to my teacher or Mum if I am feeling worried

# Changes to plans *social* *story*

At the moment, the Coronavirus is about. The virus can spread between people, so the government are giving people rules to help stop it spreading and keep people safe.

As the number of people with the virus changes, the rules may change. So if only a few people have the virus, it may be OK to go out more. If lots of people have the virus there may be more rules about not going out.

The government is trying to plan who can go back to school and when they can go back. Schools are thinking about how to organise things, so children can learn, and everybody can stay safe. The government and schools are making plans but their plans may have to change if they get new information about how the virus is spreading.

I may feel worried if I don't know for certain what will happen and when. I can talk to my mum or dad about it.

If plans change, this will be for a good reason.

I will be starting high school soon.

Some things will be the same as primary school and some will be different.

Some of my friends may go to the same high school as me and some may go to a different high school.

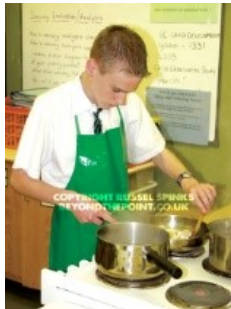
I may travel to school a different way. I can talk to my parent or carer about how I will get to school. I may need to think about what time to get up, to make sure I have enough time to get to school. It is a good idea to practice getting to school before school starts back.



I may need to take different things to school, like a PE kit, exercise books or a calculator. I may need different things on different days. My parent or carer can help me think about what things I will need each day.



I will have a form teacher, who I will usually see at form time, at the beginning of the school day. I will probably have different teachers for the other subjects. At high school, there are usually specialist teachers who are the experts in their subjects. I will still be doing Maths, English and Science. I may do some new subjects which I haven't done before.



At high school, you usually go to different rooms for each subject. I will have a timetable which says which subject I have when, and which room I need to go to.

High schools are often big. It may take me some time to find my way around. I can ask for a map of the school to help me. I can also ask teachers if I don't know how to get somewhere. The corridors can get quite busy. If I find this difficult, I can talk to a teacher about it.

At high school, teachers will give homework and will tell me when it needs to be done. If I do not understand what I need to do, I can ask them. I may have a planner to write down what I need to do, and when.

Because of Corona Virus, some things in high school may be different at the moment. We may sit further apart in class or at lunchtimes. We may have our breaks at different times. There may be other differences too. I can ask my teachers what would *usually* happen in a high school, and what is happening *just for a while* because of Corona Virus.



If there is something I am worried about, or do not understand, I can ask a teacher. Or I can talk to my parent or carer about it.

# Changes at school

These are some areas of school life which might be different

1. Playtimes
2. Lunchtimes
3. Start and End of school
4. Use of lockers
5. Lunchtime activities
6. Access to outdoor play equipment
7. Wearing of masks

Your child's school will also have received a pack of information and ideas—they will be able to provide you with some social stories that will support your child's understanding of how things might be different when they go back to school.

Please contact the SENDCO at your child's school for further specific information about the above areas.



# Communication passport

A Communication Passport is a way of helping other people understand your child's communication. You can include information about topics or interests your child has.

Your child may already have a Communication Passport; but their communication may have changed during lockdown; so it might be a good opportunity for this Communication Passport to be updated.

You can contact the Speech and Language Therapy Team if your Communication Passport needs updating; and they will be able to help you to make the alterations needed.

If you haven't had a Communication Passport before you can find a template for a Passport on this website <https://www.communicationpassports.org.uk/Home/> or you can contact the Speech and Language Therapy Team for supporting in developing a passport.

**This is my Communication Passport**

Please place your photo here

Hello. My name is:

I like to be called:

Please read!  
My communication passport will tell you the best way to communicate with me.

To be reviewed on:

Date reviewed:

**Things about Me**

- I am VERY NOSY and I listen to everything - you've been warned!
- I am generally very cheerful, so there's usually a good reason if I'm upset - up to you to find out what is wrong. I can sometimes answer Yes/No questions.
- I am not very good at waiting - I just don't understand 'later'. If you tell me something is going to happen, I will expect it NOW!

**How I Communicate**

- I use my eyes and my face (& body) to show how I'm feeling.
- I can use my eyes to 'point' to things, or people. Ask me 'Can you show me with your eyes?'
- For 'NO' (or 'I don't like that') my face crumples up and I hang my head down. (Or: I get very cross...)
- For 'YES' (or 'I like that'), I throw my head & eyes up and flash you a winning smile

**Things that help me**

- Get down to look me in the eye
- Say my name to make get me to look and listen
- Speak slowly
- Don't say too much - one 'chunk' of information at a time is just enough for me
- Then give me quiet time to take it in and think
- Show me things or point to things to help show what you mean. Some simple gestures and signs can help too.

**My favourite things**

- Food! I love it all (except bananas).
- I like videos (not TV), Bob the Builder especially (the song), & In the Night Garden
- I love all music - especially singing Nursery rhymes I know and anything fast, loud and bouncy.
- My favourite game is 'rough and tumble' & tickling with my Dad

**Things I'm good at**

- I have a fabulous smile, and I'm good at using it to make friends and for 'flirting'
- Swimming - I'm a water baby with no fear
- Eating and drinking - bring it on!
- Playing - at the moment, it's going (on my bottom) on the trampoline (with someone)

**Tricky Things**

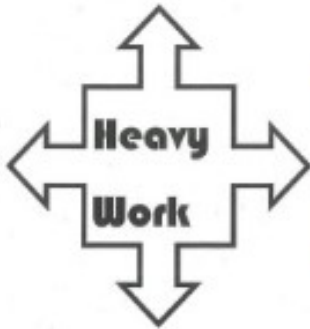
- I don't like touching sticky stuff.
- People keep wanting to give me symbols to look at, but I can't make much sense of them - yet. Best to stick to real objects and clear photos of things I know well. (I like being in charge of taking photos)
- People are not sure how well I see (that may be why I'm better at listening and choosing from spoken choices)

# Sensory strategies

## Calming strategies for Home



- Crawling under & over blankets
- Obstacle Course
- Star jumps
- Rolling across the room wrapping up in blanket Burrito
- Trampoline



- Squeezing bath toys
- Wall push-ups
- Carry something heavy
- Wheelbarrow walks
- Playdough
- Digging in the garden
- Theraband
- Making bread / kneading dough



- Chewy snacks ie jam on toast
- Crunchy snacks ie raw carrot or bread sticks
- Blowing games / bubbles
- Warm drink



- Wrap up tightly in a blanket
- Sandwich between cushions
- Give yourself a hug
- Wrap in warm towel
- Tactile box



- Use natural light when possible



Use soft tone of voice



- Calming sounds ie Rain Rain App
- Soft voices
- Reduce noise



# Wellbeing and self-care

The period of transition back to school might be stressful for you and for your young person. At times of stress, it is even more important than usual to look after yourself, and to support your child in developing their own self-care.

There are lots of ideas and strategies in the child/ young person booklet to help you support your child to understand their emotions and create opportunities to develop their wellbeing.

Try to take at least five minutes per day for self-care, and encourage your child to do the same.

<b>Listen to music</b>	<b>Go outside</b>	<b>Use a mindfulness app or do meditation</b>
<b>Do some exercise</b>	<b>Sit down with a cup of tea/ coffee</b>	<b>Read a book or magazine</b>
<b>Watch something funny on TV</b>	<b>Do some baking</b>	<b>Hug someone</b>
<b>Call one of your friends for a catch up</b>	<b>Draw, paint or be creative</b>	<b>Look at photographs which make you happy</b>
<b>Practice a deep breathing exercise</b>	<b>Do some colouring in</b>	<b>Have a bubble bath</b>

# Top Tips

1. Use pictures and words to help your child's understanding of their new routine
2. Be prepared to repeat the information about what is happening lots of times
3. Ensure your child has plenty of opportunities to continue to do the activities they love
4. Give your child the opportunity to share their worries and fears with you
5. Support your child to connect with their friends; virtually or a socially-distanced meet in the park
6. Use the social stories to help your child understand what might be different about school.



# Further help and support

## 1. Visuals

- <https://do2learn.com/>
- <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/glowblogs/communicationfriendlyenvironments/>

(useful visuals about social distancing)

## 2. Incredible five point scale

<https://www.5pointscale.com/>

## 3. Social Stories

<https://carolgraysocialstories.com/>

## 4. Communication Passports

<https://www.communicationpassports.org.uk/creating-passports/>

## 5. information about well-being and other useful information

<https://www.camhs-resources.co.uk/>



Picture by Tian Patel, age 6

This resource represents a multi agency collaboration within Manchester. Contributors include Specialist Speech and Language Therapists; Educational Psychologists; Clinical Psychologists; Specialist Learning Disability Nurses; Occupational Therapists; and parents across the city.