



ERC

COUNSELORS & CONSULTANTS

Returning to School Amid COVID-19

The coronavirus pandemic has caused major disruptions to daily life, and as we like to say at ERC, children are the barometers of what is happening in the world around them. While returning to school, in whatever format it takes, will not only be welcomed and possibly exciting for some students, others will be feeling anxious or frightened. Here are tips to help your children navigate some of the complicated emotions they may be facing when going back to school.

- Encourage children to talk about their concerns and to express their feelings. Some children may be hesitant to initiate such conversations, so you may want to prompt them by asking what concerns they might have. When talking with younger children, try to talk on their level, such as, "I wonder what it'll feel like to go back to school? What do you think? Will it feel awesome or amazing, or maybe a little weird or sad?"
- Talk honestly about your own feelings regarding them returning to school. It is important for children to recognize they are not dealing with their feelings or fears alone. Share what you know and what you don't know.
- Validate your child's feelings. Do not minimize your child's concerns. Reassure children about the safety measures in place to keep students and teachers healthy, and remind them about the positives—that they will be able to see their friends and teachers (if they are physically returning to the classroom) and continue learning new things.
- Empower children to take action regarding their own safety. Discuss the safety procedures that are in place at your child's school. Encourage and show them how to follow precautions (such as frequent handwashing, how to properly wear a mask, physical distancing, etc.). Help your child understand that such precautions are in place to ensure his/her safety and emphasize the importance of adhering to school rules and procedures.
- Discuss ahead of time that schools may open and close again. This will help them to be prepared for more changes ahead. It's also important to continue to remind them that learning can happen anywhere—at school and at home—and that they can keep in touch with and support their friends online.
- Recognize behavior that may indicate your child is concerned about returning to school. Younger children may react by not wanting to discuss school or participate in back-to-school activities. Teens and adolescents may minimize their concerns outwardly but may become argumentative or withdrawn.
- Remind your child that they can talk to you anytime, especially if they feel anxious, fearful, or unsafe. It's important to be calm and proactive in your conversations with children. Check in with them to see how they are doing. Their emotions will change regularly, and you need to show them that it is okay.
- Don't be afraid to seek help. If you are worried about your child's reaction or have ongoing concerns about his/her behavior or emotions, ERC customers can contact us at 1-800-222-8590 for free and confidential counseling.

For an additional resource, Children's Wisconsin offers an excellent video on *How to Talk to Your Kids About Going Back to School* that can be accessed at [this link](#).