



BEDFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

COVID-19
(Coronavirus)



A Parent's Guide to Returning to Early Years Settings

Supporting children's transition back to early years settings

Children's Services

Contents

Introduction	3
Pupils with Identified Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND); Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) or Social Communication needs (with or without an EHCP), Looked After Children (LAC) and those with Child in Need (CIN) or Child Protection Plans (CPP)	6
Some Useful Websites	7

Acknowledgements


This guide has been compiled by Educational Psychologists at Bedford Borough Council. The key principles espoused in this document draw on government guidance at the time of compilation. It is acknowledged that given the very transitory nature of the rate of infection (R-rate), this information is subject to change. The material presented in this guide, references key theoretical assumptions from relevant literature as well as practical techniques and strategies that have been acquired with the very kind permission from both Wakefield (2020) and BiBorough Councils (2020).

Introduction

When young children return to an Early Years setting following the global lockdown, many things will be different, and this is likely to induce a level of anxiety. The unprecedented months spent at home may have instigated a major interruption in many children's social and emotional development. This advice is designed to support parents to help manage their children's return to an Early Years setting by considering their mental health; possible bereavements; illness; the impact of economic changes to livelihoods; parental stress / anxiety; and changes in friendships and relationships (to name but a few). The Top Tips which follow will be supported by the [ECP Facebook group](#) - which will be offering on-going and personalized support.



- **Familiarise your child with the setting:** Take a walk to the setting and point out any different entrances and exits which may be used. This will help your child explore and practice their new routine. Talk through what the first day back after lockdown may look like, and explain they will need to wash their hands very regularly.
- **Introduce new terminology:** Even the youngest children will have heard phrases such as 'social distancing', 'coronavirus', 'covid', 'pandemic', 'hand sanitiser' and 'bubbles'. Talk openly with your child about these words, and how important it is to stay healthy. [Online books](#) can help explain the current situation to young children, as well as [older children](#).
- **Establish a daily routine:** It is important to maintain consistent daily routines, especially during the settling-in phase in the initial weeks. Children respond well to boundaries as it helps them to feel safe. Aim for consistency with the times that your child wakes up, has lunch, has dinner and goes to bed. For example, a bedtime routine could consist of a bath at 7pm followed by a story and lights out by 7.30pm. Avoid letting your child use electronic devices at bedtime as this continues to stimulate the brain. Children aged 2-5 years should be getting around [11 hours sleep](#) each night.
- **Help your child to manage his/her feelings:** Help your child to understand a range of different feeling and emotions they may be experiencing. This could be linked to missing friends and family due to the lockdown, or some children may be struggling to understand bereavement.
 - **Play games**, such as taking 'selfies' or drawing pictures of happy, sad or worried faces. Give appropriate examples of what makes you feel happy, sad or worried and encourage your child to take turns and do the same.
 - **Read books** such as ['Everybody Worries'](#) to talk about feelings.
 - **If your family has experienced bereavement** during this time, notify your setting so that a plan can be put into place to support your child's wellbeing further. The [Winston's Wish](#) website specifically offers support to children who have experienced bereavement.

- **Behavioural Regulation:** Remember that all behaviour is a form of communication. Behaviour may be more challenging or disruptive than usual and include: aggression; irritability; defiance; temper outbursts; or hyper-sensitivity. Children may complain of physical symptoms such as stomach ache or feeling sick. Understand any changes and behaviour may be linked to anxieties of returning to their setting. Calmly address the behaviour and gently talk around feelings, emotions and reassure them that they will be safe and loved. Listening to your child's worries is important. Consider calming activities that you can do together such as: colouring in; baking; playing football; reading books etc.
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- **Practice mindfulness techniques** to help your child regulate their emotions. These include:
 - Taking slower, deeper breaths, in through the nose, out through the mouth (from the abdomen or diaphragm).
 - Blowing bubbles or blowing into a pinwheel.
 - Slowly blow out 'candles' on their fingertips.
 - Imagining that with each breath, their body becomes filled slowly with a soothing colour, aroma, light, or warmth.
 - Breathe in for three, hold for three, out for three.
 - **Plan for separation anxiety:** Even if your child has not experienced difficulties separating from you in the past, their experiences during the lockdown period (whether positive or negative), may instigate separation difficulties including clinging onto you at drop-off or refusing or not wanting to attend. Inform the staff if your child is having difficulty separating from you and work with the staff to make sure they understand your child's interests so they will have engaging activities ready and waiting. Reading books such as ['Owl Babies' by Martin Waddell](#) will provide reassurance that their parent/carer will return to collect them from nursery.
 - **Transitional objects (e.g. a toy):** Children may require extra support to make the emotional transition from dependence to independence when leaving you. Transitional objects can help comfort children and support them through this transition but it may be difficult to facilitate this in their setting with the current government guidance on the risk of infection spread. A good substitute is a photo of their favourite toy (or favourite person) which can be laminated for your child to hold while away from you (and can easily be replaced if lost).
 - **Help to build self-esteem:** Your child may frequently say, 'I can't do it' or avoid activities that are perceived to be too challenging. Help your child to develop a sense of mastery and control to connect with their personal strengths. Instill the notion that others believe in them and are interested in their ideas. Play games and set challenges which can be achieved by your child and praise them for persevering. These are some of the [characteristics of effective learning](#) which the staff and Reception teachers will support your child to develop during their Early Years' learning journey.

- **Effective and enhanced communication with the setting:** Check to see if your setting has a Facebook or Twitter page and 'like' or 'follow' this to keep updated with announcements. Explore the setting's website which may have staff photos which you can share with your child, and play games of 'Who's Who?' It may be useful for settings to provide you with a virtual photo book and/or video tours identifying key areas, e.g. entrance, toilets, outdoor area, pegs, and how these may be different upon returning to the setting. Contact the setting directly to find out what they are doing in this respect.
- **Remember that support is available:** ECP Children Centre will support families who have children under 5yrs of age during Covid 19 on 0300 323 0245. Regular social events include:
 - **Wellbeing group** – Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Book a place using [Eventbrite](#).
 - **Wiggles and Jiggles** – Thursdays 10am.
 - **Live Stories and Rhymes** – Tuesdays 10am.
 - **Family Support Inquiries**, including advice on behaviour, sleep, oral health – 0300 323 0245.
 - **Health Visitor advice** – 0300 555 0606.

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- **Individual programmes of re-integration:**

For all pupils identified as vulnerable (particularly those with EHCPs), regular liaisons between parents/carers, services working with the child/ family and nursery staff, is recommended, where possible, to coproduce the most effective reintegration plan. This should aim to unite the up-to-date strategies and routines that have been successful at home, with the expert advice from specific services, and the setting support and teaching approaches that have proved effective in the past.

- **Boundaries and routines:** Ensure that your child knows what is expected of them, and how familiar situations and routines have changed due to the impact of coronavirus.

- **Emotional Wellbeing:** Your child may require an enhanced level of planned emotional support and nurture, through caring relationships with key adults, to enable a successful reintegration. Many settings will have remained in close contact with individuals throughout the period of closure and have an idea of how they are coping, however this may manifest itself differently in the nursery environment. Understanding the child's emotional wellbeing will help staff gauge the right time to reintroduce regular routines

- **Safety:** Children with SEND may require greater support to recognise how to stay safe and understand any new rules, such as those related to hygiene and social distancing.



Some Useful Websites

- <https://www.camhs-resources.co.uk/coronavirus>
- www.boingboing.org.uk
- www.nurtureuk.org
- www.youngminds.org
- www.elsa-support.co.uk

Remember, support is available, please get in touch if you would like to talk about any of these matters.

Finding out more

If you would like further copies, a large-print copy or information about us and our services, please telephone or write to us at our address below.

Për Informacion

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