

SPRINGVALE PRIMARY SCHOOL
01226 760930

Headteacher: Mr L McClure
l.mcclure@springvaleprimary.org
www.springvaleprimary.org
@SpringvalePS



Week 33 Supporting Pupils to Return

Dear families,

After these unprecedented weeks, we have all been faced with change to our daily lives and routine and we all know how this has made us feel. Many adults and children find change to be an anxious, unsettling period. As we have adapted to the initial change in March, we are now getting ready for a further change in June.

An excellent article has been written by psychologist Dr Tara Quinlivan explaining how children may feel about the return to school, behaviours that parents may see and why, as well as helpful ways to prepare children for leaving you and coming back to school. Here are some extracts from it...

First, our children will be hit by the anticipatory anxiety of going out into a world that feels unsafe. Over the past few weeks we've had to teach them that the outside world is dangerous and that staying home is a must. Soon we will renege on that claim and force them back into the world we just told them was unsafe. It's going to a tricky transition for them. Second, once they are at school they'll discover it isn't exactly the same experience that they knew before COVID19. There will likely be many differences..and the additional safety procedures the school is implementing. This lack of congruity is likely to be uncomfortable. For children the 'not quite the sameness' and anticipatory anxiety will only be compounded by their innate desire to be near their caregivers and places of security when they feel distressed.

Some things you might start to see in the coming weeks include:

- Reluctance or refusal to go to school
- Increased clingyness in the morning
- Increased tearfulness
- Poor sleep on nights before school
- Temper tantrums on school mornings
- Feeling sick- especially stomach aches, headaches and any other ache related to muscle tension (sore legs, jaws etc)

We might be tempted to see these behaviours as signs of being naughty, attention seeking or just wanting to stay home because it's easier than school. However, we've told our kids that the outside world is dangerous. We've told them this with every conceivable messaging tool we have. We've literally told them, then we've modelled it (by staying home etc) then we've subtly taught them again via our own anxiety. Right now the most sensible thing their little bodies can do is react to the invisible danger. You know who else will be in this mode? Us. We're likely to send our children back, with a fair amount of trepidation. Add to that the external pressures of departmental requirements and parental work changes and our stress centres will be singing. The truth is there is no one great solution. I will attach a list of strategies at the end and you can feel free to choose any if they suit you. But, the main thing I want you to take away from this piece is curiosity, knowledge and understanding. Question the behaviours you see in the children around you and question your response.

Thursday 28th May 2020

Approach problematic behaviours with good faith. Predict and assume that you are facing a frightened child rather than a disobedient one. We have far more sympathy for our children's behaviours when they're sick than when they're well. We can tolerate and nurture more whining and clinging when given a medical context. Right now all of our souls feel a little sick. Take that empathy and patience and reframe children's behaviours in your own mind. You'll be amazed how powerful the presence of a sympathetic, contained and curious adult can be on the most violent of children's behaviours.

Strategies

Basically you want to gradually expose your kids to all things school related. You can try:

- Start your normal morning routine a week before school starts*
- Visit school before it starts*
- Start using language such as "when you go to school" rather than "if you go to school"*
- Use visual aids such as calendars to count down to school starting.*
- If you know what safety procedures your school will be implementing discuss them a few times before school starts (ie you'll still be doing lots of hand washing, your teacher will still be using the hand sanitiser, Mrs X won't be back at school till the virus has gone down a bit more). Be especially mindful around any "kiss and go" arrangements as children may react strongly if they were expecting you to walk them to their door.*

We can also start to prime our children emotionally:

- give emotions names. These can be names such as "sad", "angry" or "worried". But they can also be descriptive words such as "shakey", "fuzzy", "spiny", "gurgley", "heavy". To describe my trip to the shops I might say; "I was so excited to go, but then when I got there I felt surprised and disappointed because it wasn't the same. I felt a bit fuzzy the whole time, a bit wobbly wobbly and I was happy to come home. But it was also really fun to drive somewhere new and see the autumn trees that bit felt warm and nice"*
- Check in with kids before school starts. Ask them what they're looking forward to, what they think might be different, what they're expecting. Validate any fears and correct any misconceptions.*
- Problem solve with kids- if something is a particular worry, work with kids to help come up with a few solutions. Include kids in this problem solving.*
- Use your own feelings as a model to begin a conversation.*
- Stay calm ourselves.*
- Communicate with your school*

To reassure you, our priority at Springvale will be the children's well-being on return to school and how we can best support them. We plan to...

- Have lots of opportunities to talk and connect with each other again
- Share with children the routine for the day, so they know what is coming
- Have small 'chunks' of teaching with lots of breaks to build up their concentration
- Plan activities based on well-being and mindfulness
- Share stories and activities focused on feelings

We are looking forward to seeing many children again over the coming days and weeks.

Kind Regards, Mrs D Royston, Wellbeing Team Leader