

Transitioning back to High School

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Transitioning back to high school, timetables, teachers, and peers will take some adjustment for your teenager. School has been online and remote for a significant part of the school year. Teenagers now have to get out of their oodles and hoodies and back into school uniforms. To help the family and your teenager to get ready these steps may help.

What do I need to consider?

Talking about the transition

It is important to have a chat about your teenager's attitude towards returning to school. We may assume that the return to friends, school sports and lunch times will make them deliriously happy. Yet teenagers may not be. For some teens there may be an unwillingness to return to the structure of the school day with earlier starts and regular homework or some peer group changes. It is important to gauge how your teenager feels about the return to school and recognise if they feel negative or upset by this. A good strategy is to connect with them about their feelings, discuss strategies and ways to motivate them to get ready and reassure them that their teachers and schools will support them and welcome them back.

Being prepared.

- Make sure you listen to your teenager as well as talk about some of the positive and fun aspects of returning to school, such as being with friends, seeing their teachers, and getting active.

- Encourage your teenager to start becoming more independent and organised by planning getting up and sleep times, checking bus routes and start times for schools, revising the timetable and checking in on Covid safety, school announcements and schedules.

- Consider if a return to school or extra-curricular sport or activities can happen and fit into the new routines.

- Note if your teenager is not coping well with the idea of returning to school. If they seem more anxious, withdrawn, angry, easily irritated or refuse to go to school seek some help (<https://au.reachout.com/tools-and-apps>) and have an open conversation.

- Encourage your teenager to make connections with friends and arrange a meet up time for the first time back to school to help them settle in and regain connections with peers.

Independence and Self-Care

Teenagers are learning to be independent at this stage of their lives but the recent impact of Covid restrictions and the varied routines of the last school term may have altered their ability to self-care, regulate and choose options. It is useful to focus on developing these capacities to help in their transition back to school.

Self-care and independence can help teenagers to manage their stress, build resilience and be grateful and happy in everyday tasks or activities. Make sure teenagers have activities such as walking, sports, extra-curricular or hobbies built into a weekly schedule around school. Discuss when homework can be done to fit around these important tasks. Encourage teens to manage their own preparation for school, equipment, masks, lunches, and transport. Take the time to make sure your teenager understands the Covid safe social distancing practices they need to be responsible for.

How do I help my teenager with study when they return to school?

Teenagers often feel overwhelmed by the amount and time pressures of study and with the return to school they may notice they have fallen behind or possibly moved ahead at their own learning. Now the teacher will be regulating the learning and homework may be more frequent, or the pace of learning much faster to catch up on topics or practicals. Getting your teenager to write down in a student diary, whiteboard, google calendar tasks for each day is an important step. We can build in reward and chill out time into this schedule and assist our teenagers to see how chunks of productive study gives them a sense of success and enables rewards to be enjoyed. A great tip is to discuss what they really like to do with their time, what they must do with their and when it needs to be finished by, and how long they think each task will take. Seems simple and practical, but it works. Studies by Adams & Blair (2019) show us if your teenager can manage their time and have an academic work and life balance, they achieve higher marks or grades in their subjects. It works because it buffers student stress and anxiety at the critical point in time and also builds stronger academic success for future study and work.

Managing the Stress

When dealing with back to school melt-downs try and stay calm and see this as a normal setback. Over 40% of teenagers at this time can feel very distressed or even depressed or anxious. Your teenager may be negative, lethargic or a little more irritable. We need to avoid reacting and understand their pressures. If our young person is increasingly showing these signs, then help from others such as [Headspace](#), [Reach Out](#) and [Beyond Blue](#) can really be important.

Getting the balance right

Creating safe and stable routines around teenagers' priorities and needs such as "sleeping, eating, and socialising" is important and can help to avoid the difficult moments or get us all back on track. Spend some time after the school day or at dinner to find out how things are going, what changes are happening, and how they are feeling. Having a check in point for younger and older teens is really important. So, agree on a wake-time, dinner chat and the wind-down times. Sleep may also be more critical in the transition, as returning to school requires more physical and mental energy than turning on a laptop. Make sure teens get enough sleep and recognise that they may be more tired than normal, re-adjusting to school and routines. It may be good to have a chat about how much sleep a teenager really needs- 9-10 hours per day.

Remember that teenagers may need some tools and tips to manage their stress. These can include mindfulness and taking a break/chill out moments, and getting back to other tasks, hobbies, and sports that they love. Make sure they are connecting with friends in a Covid safe way, and maybe discuss how to manage screen time now they are back in the classroom.

Most importantly, give your teen and the family time to re-adjust and focus more on well-being and getting re-connected with their school.

Good links to check out are:

NSW Department of Education Helpful tips for returning to high school
https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/covid19/Helpful_tips_for_returning_to_high_school.pdf

Association of Independent Schools, NSW
<https://www.aisnsw.edu.au/learning-from-home/wellbeing>

Relationships Australia, NSW.
<https://www.relationshipsnsw.org.au/getting-back-to-the-new-normal-school/>

References

Adams, R. V., & Blair, E. (2019). Impact of time management behaviors on undergraduate engineering students' performance. *SAGE Open*, 9(1), 2158244018824506.

