

Coronavirus (COVID-19)



Prep and Year 1 return to school: Supporting students' mental health and wellbeing

As outlined in the [COVID-19 Return to school planning considerations](#), with students in Prep and Year 1 returning to school from 11 May, schools need to plan for monitoring and responding to increased wellbeing concerns. This fact sheet provides information about how school staff can support Prep and Year 1 students' wellbeing and mental health as they transition back to school, including where to get information and advice.

Practical considerations

Drop off and pick up: Changes to normal school drop off procedures may be necessary to ensure physical distancing requirements for adults can be adhered to. If alternative processes are put in place which mean that parents/carers are not able to walk with their child to the classroom, ensure clear communication occurs with parents and adequate staff are on hand to escort students safely to their classroom. These alternative processes may be unsettling for some students, who may already be anxious about leaving their parents/carers.

Staggered recess and lunch times: To comply with physical distancing requirements for adults and to minimise student interaction across class groups and outside of the classroom, it may be necessary to stagger lunch times for students. An appropriate number of staff should be on duty to ensure there continues to be adequate supervision of students during each lunch time session.

Communicating with parents

Any changes to normal school routines and processes, including drop off and pick up and lunch times, should be clearly communicated to parents. This will ensure that parents can talk to their child and explain what will be happening for them at school. Encourage parents to call the school if they have any questions or concerns about the new arrangements.

Helping students feel safe at school

During the learning at home period, school staff and parents helped young children understand that staying away from school and their friends was necessary to keep them healthy and safe. Students may now feel worried about whether it is safe for them to be back at school, especially if they have siblings who are still at home.

It is important to talk to your students about how they feel about being back at school and to assure them that it is safe. Talking to young students in a clear and calm way will help them to feel safe and less worried. Tell students the facts, including that:

- Schools are making decisions based on health advice.
- Everyone at school is going to make sure they are keeping safe, and there is plenty of soap at school so that everyone can wash their hands many times a day.
- Students are allowed to sit next to their friends in the classroom and during group activities, as children like them usually do not get sick from COVID-19.
- The Government is keeping an eye on COVID-19 – if it starts to spread again, decisions about what we need to do to keep everyone safe will be made quickly.
- If anyone at your school does feel sick, they will stay away from school until they feel better.



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Challenges for students coming back to school

Some students may be concerned about being back at school for reasons that are not related to the Coronavirus. Prep and Year 1 students may experience distress related to:

- Being separated from parents, carers and immediate family.
- School work - some students may be worried that they missed out on learning while at home.
- Social relationships with friends and peers.

Supporting students in the classroom

Your school's [whole school approach](#) to supporting students' mental health and wellbeing provides a strong framework for supporting students during this challenging time. With the help of support staff, you can support students' return to school by:

- Ensuring mental health and wellbeing is a priority
- Providing opportunities to talk about how your students are feeling as a class group.
- Focusing on establishing and maintaining school and classroom routines.
- Including wellbeing activities in the school day (see [Wellbeing activities for learning at home](#) for example activities that can be done in the classroom).

Getting advice and support

- Talk to your guidance officer and student support team about your school's approach to supporting students' mental health and wellbeing, and any particular concerns for individual students.
- Ensure students who need additional or more intensive support are linked in with the guidance officer or other support staff.
- Contact your [Regional Mental Health Coach](#) for advice and support about adapting and adding to your school's whole school approach to supporting students' mental health and wellbeing.
- Access [BeYou](#) for information about [supporting educators during the pandemic](#).

Staff support

The department recognises the significant impact of COVID-19 and subsequent changes to education delivery on teaching staff. A range of information and resources for staff are available on [One Portal](#).