



# SUPPORTING PRIMARY SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN RETURN TO SCHOOL

## HELPFUL THINGS FOR SCHOOLS TO KNOW

Everyday life has changed and brought with it a level of uncertainty for many children, young people and their families. As they face another period of adjustment, it is understandable that we might notice changes in our children when they return to school.

### CHANGES IN WELLBEING:

Children’s experience and responses to COVID-19 and their return to school will vary. For some children the period of time away will have brought increased worries, uncomfortable feelings, and for some a feeling of threat for their survival. For other children, the time away from school may have been a pleasant experience. They may return to school excited to see their friends, teachers and eager to engage in work. Others may need more support.

### KOHIKOHI - GATHER INFORMATION & OBSERVE:

In the first weeks, it is important to identify students who aren’t successfully adapting to school. Some changes in children’s behaviour are attempts to cope with a difficult or challenging situation. Here are some common responses:

<p><i>Children aged 6-11 years</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Behaving like a younger child</li> <li>▪ Clinging to parents or caregivers – separation anxiety.</li> <li>▪ Sleep problems</li> <li>▪ Become irritable, angry, or disruptive</li> <li>▪ Be unable to concentrate on learning tasks</li> <li>▪ Complain of physical problems such as stomach aches and headaches</li> <li>▪ Develop unfounded fears</li> <li>▪ Lose interest in fun activities</li> <li>▪ Preoccupation with safety and danger. May have worries about another disaster happening.</li> <li>▪ General worries</li> <li>▪ School performance and attendance issues</li> </ul>
<p><i>Younger children aged 5 or with a developmental delay</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increased clinginess to parents or caregivers</li> <li>▪ Sudden return to behaviours such as bed-wetting and thumb sucking</li> <li>▪ Show imaginary play that includes references to the recent event such as separation, illness, medical care, being ‘stuck’, losing or missing things</li> </ul>

Table 1: Changes in Behaviour

It is common to show the above behaviours right away after experiencing stress. It is important to know that children are resilient and for the majority of children, over time, they will return to their prior levels of functioning.

## WHAT TO DO IF CONCERNS CONTINUE

A number of factors can impact on a child or young person’s response to a stressful event:

Risks factors BEFORE	Risk factors DURING	Risk factors AFTER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academic difficulties</li> <li>Previous trauma or stressful life event</li> <li>History of emotional or behavioural problems</li> <li>Fewer friendships</li> <li>Parents who have difficulty providing reassurance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experienced fear that they would get hurt or die.</li> <li>Experienced increased stress through financial hardship or exposure to unsafe behaviours (e.g. domestic violence or neglect)</li> <li>Separation from a family member during lock-down (split caregivers and bubble arrangements).</li> <li>A loved one was infected and/or passed away.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Significant lifestyle changes such as relocation, a new home, new school due to caregiver unemployment.</li> <li>Limited social support from family and friends</li> <li>Emotional disconnection from friends and family</li> <li>Re-experiencing traumatic events through the media</li> <li>Loss of hope in the future</li> <li>Belief that the world is unsafe and unpredictable</li> </ul>

Table 2: Risk Factors

It will be important to closely monitor the wellbeing of students exposed to the risk factors above.

It may be necessary to involve other agencies (Contact Ministry of Education Learning Support or local Child and Youth Mental Health team) for support if you notice a student:

- Show an increase, not a gradual decrease, of the behaviours listed in Table 1: Changes in Behaviour.
- The behaviours are persisting and interfering with everyday functioning even after 4 weeks.

## HOW SCHOOLS CAN SUPPORT CHILDREN’S RETURN TO SCHOOL

In general, the transition back to school will have many similarities to transitioning back from summer holidays. The same strategies you use at the beginning of the year be the foundation for supporting your students now.

### RELATIONSHIPS:

Whakawhanaungatanga and re-connection will be the foundation for learning and building resilience.

- Take the time to reconnect to students, family and whanau.** Rebuild connection through simple actions such as individual personal greetings, asking how students are doing, engaging them in conversations about their hobbies/interests and giving plenty of positive acknowledgements and praise.

- **Check-in/Check-out:** This is a daily, brief one-to-one chat about how things are going and commenting what is going well for the student, often focused on a few specific behaviour goals. These are typically done at the beginning and end of the day. Check-in / Check-outs are a great tool for those students who need extra support. They can be done by a teacher or another staff member (e.g. principal / SENCO).
- **Plan for separation anxiety.** Younger students may find it hard to separate from their parents again. Plan with their parents to keep to a consistent drop-off time and routine. Teachers can set out some high-interest activities for students to engage in as soon as they enter the room to distract and uplift mood.

## REASSURANCE

- **Talk to children about what is happening in a developmentally appropriate way.** Be mindful that children will have heard different amounts of information from their families. The key is to balance the facts of the situation with a positive, solution orientated message:
  - *For 5-6 year olds: brief and simple information that balances facts with reassurances is more than enough. Emphasise that “adults are working hard to keep you safe.”*
  - *For 7-10 year olds: focus on giving accurate information to separate facts from rumour and fantasy. Make sure it is not all “doom and gloom” by including information on the proactive efforts people are doing nationally, regionally and in the community to prevent COVID-19 from spreading.*
- **Model calm in your attitude and in your responses to talking about COVID-19.** Younger students may not understand events related to COVID-19, but will take their cue from other people’s reactions.
- **Social distancing is not social isolation.** Friends are extremely important to students and it important to keep connecting with those in separate school bubbles. Consider ways in which this could be achieved in a safe way, such as writing letters, or interactive classroom blog posts, kind messages through window art or arranging video chats to other classes.
- **Classroom projects on helping others in the community can give a sense of control for students.** During lockdown children put teddy bears, Easter eggs and ANZAC flowers in their windows/letters boxes to cheer others up on their daily walks. Talk about the way we helped and can keep helping others. Consider a class project to help your school and wider community. This can give children a feeling of wider connection, as well as a healthy sense of control.

## ROUTINES

Reteach and remind students of your school routines and school-wide expectations. Routines are very important for making students feel like COVID-19 has not taken over all aspects of their life. The more students know what to expect during their school day, the more secure they will feel.

- **Keep the start and end of the day the same as much as possible.** The school day is going to look different for a while. It may not be possible to keep entire routine the same, but maintain some familiar routines (e.g. your routine karakia or roll-call activities).

- **A visual timetable or individual visual timetables** will help increase predictability and a sense of security. It will also help younger children track time if they are anxious for the school day to finish in the first few weeks.
- **Try to communicate early with parents so they can prepare their child in advance.** Any difference to regular routines is important for the child to know, such as a child's teacher not returning to school due to being high risk. Try to lengthen the time a student has to process any change.

## REGULATION

As children will experience different emotions associated with the recent events, they also will respond to these emotions in a range of ways.

- **Use the strategies your school and students already know for managing emotions.** When we are stressed and dealing with change, it is better to go back to what is familiar rather than learn something new. Do a brainstorm of activities your students already use to calm or brighten their mood. You can make visuals such as posters and use them as a reminder to practice them if they feel upset during the day.
- **Use the strategies your school already knows for managing emotions.** What are your school wide approaches to supporting children when they feel overwhelmed, angry or upset? Remind your class of these, such as a calm zone, sensory box in class or key adults who they can turn to for help.
- **Normalise feelings.** Children will experience different emotional reactions to recent events. They will also respond to their emotions in a range of ways. Some may feel embarrassed, ashamed or worried about how they are coping. Speak to your students about how we all deal with change differently and that there is no "right way". Validate each experience and emphasise that all ranges of emotional reactions are understandable and okay.
- **Encourage expression of feelings.** Use drawings, stories, questions or books to encourage children to express their feelings. You could provide a feelings box where children can write down their questions and thoughts.

*\*Note: Do not force children to open up if they are unwilling. It is better to follow the child's lead.*

- **Mindfulness / Yoga programmes.** It may be helpful to build in opportunities to practice mindfulness, breathing techniques or yoga. They can be great tools to help children manage challenging emotions. If your school is unfamiliar with mindfulness or yoga programmes, it may be best to start with teaching some simple breathing techniques linked below.
- **Physical exercise and food.** Ensure every class has a brain break, as well as morning tea and lunch. Regular food and water are going to help alleviate anxiety. Additionally, an extra movement break during the day and getting outside as much as possible (e.g. built into discovery / topic time) will be helpful. Some students may need more additional breaks than others.
- **Encourage a Growth Mindset.** A growth mindset is the belief that our abilities can be developed and shaped through perseverance, good strategies and support from others.

- At the same time, it is appropriate to initially adjust expectations to your students' concentration and engagement. Difficulty concentrating is a common symptom of stress. Instructional support (i.e. shortening tasks, chunking, focusing on revision or consolidation of learnt knowledge) and working at a slower pace can be a responsive way to support student wellbeing and confidence.

Links to resources:

- [Something Bad Happened – Free book online](#)
- [RELAXATION / BREATHING TECHNIQUES](#)
- [Mindfulness / Yoga programmes](#)
- [GROWTH MINDSET](#)
- [Tips on distance schooling \(if you continue this at level 2\)](#)

## SUPPORTING THOSE WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

Our students with special learning needs (cognitive, physical, communication, behavioural) may need extra reassurance and support. Children with special needs often have less control over their day-to-day life. Students with underlying health issues may also feel more at risk. The additional loss of control and increase in a sense of threat can mean that students feel higher levels of distress, worry and/or anger.

- **Keep an extra eye out for behavioural changes listed in [Table 1: Changes in Behaviour](#).** This may indicate their emotional state, as students with developmental delays may have difficulty expressing their worries in words.
- **Review your support plan and check-in with the wider team.** You may already have a team of teachers and professionals who are working together to support your students. Re-familiarise yourself with their support plan and talk with the school SENCO, Learning Support Coordinator or RTLB professionals to discuss adaptations or strategies for transition back to school.
- **Additional support and planning may be required for students who already have transition plans in place or are school refusers.** Don't expect to start where you left off in the plan. It may be back to square one.
- **Be mindful of your language.** Make sure it matches your student's developmental age.
  - What does "state of emergency" or "level 2" mean?
  - Use visuals, social stories, videos or role plays to communicate these clearly.
  - Check their understanding by asking them to relay back in their own way.
  - Regularly repeating essential facts will be important.

Links to additional resources:

- [Supporting Individuals with Autism through Uncertain Times](#)

## SUPPORTING THE WIDER SCHOOL COMMUNITY

### TEACHER WELL-BEING AND RESILIENCY

Adults will also have a range of responses and emotions linked to the recent events. It is important to monitor your own responses to being back in the classroom.

- **Take care of your best resource - YOU!** Consider how you too are supporting your own wellbeing. What strategies have you done in the past to effectively cope with uncertainty and stress? Can you practice them routinely at this time?
- **Limit your comparisons with others if it is negatively affecting you.** Teacher's Facebook page can be helpful, but it may also not be what you need right now when you are not sure you are doing enough. Everyone's classroom, school and community is different. Keep your contacts small and supportive.
- **Support each other.** Check-in on your colleagues. This is the time to share resources and be generous. Senior management can do some spot visits during the first few weeks to provide additional support.
- **Make use of counselling services.** There is no health without mental health. Access to counselling or mental health professions may be available through your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). You can also use the National Telehealth Service by texting or free-phone **1737**. This line is open 24/7.

### PARENTS

Good communication between home and school will decrease parents' anxiety (which their children will pick up on).

- **Tag-team your message to your students.** Parents need to know what messages and information the school is giving so that they can reinforce the same information at home.
- **In the advice to parents about preparing their child for first day back, compare it to transitioning back after the summer holidays.** Include basic information like packing their bag the night before with book bag, raincoat, lunch and drink bottle (perhaps a little extra for lunch), ensure uniform is ready to go, school shoes still fit, etc. - all the stuff we are out of the habit of doing. Let them know there will be an adjustment period and that this is okay!
- **Encourage parents to listen to your child.** Some students may be worried about returning to school. Encourage parents to allow children to share their feelings and listen carefully before providing reassurance.

## COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

There are a wide range of local, regional and community supports which are able to provide additional advice and guidance at this time. Remember – it takes a village!



## ADDITIONAL LINKS AND RESOURCES:

### RELAXATION / BREATHING TECHNIQUES:

NAME	CONTACT / WEB ADDRESS
Balloon Breathing Technique	<a href="https://ecdn.teacherspayteachers.com/thumbitem/Self-Regulation-and-Management-SEL-FREE-Balloon-Breathing-Posters-3388432-1506602875/original-3388432-2.jpg">https://ecdn.teacherspayteachers.com/thumbitem/Self-Regulation-and-Management-SEL-FREE-Balloon-Breathing-Posters-3388432-1506602875/original-3388432-2.jpg</a>
Lazy 8 Breathing Technique	<a href="https://hope4hurtingkids.com/emotions/coping-skills/lazy-8-breathing/">https://hope4hurtingkids.com/emotions/coping-skills/lazy-8-breathing/</a>
Fun Breathing exercises	<a href="https://exploringyourmind.com/4-fun-breathing-exercises-children/">https://exploringyourmind.com/4-fun-breathing-exercises-children/</a>

### MINDFULNESS PROGRAMMES:

NAME	CONTACT / WEB ADDRESS
Example mindfulness programme for schools	<a href="https://mindfulnesseducation.nz/pause-breathe-smile/">https://mindfulnesseducation.nz/pause-breathe-smile/</a>
Yoga 4 classrooms	<a href="http://www.yoga4classrooms.com/yoga-4-classrooms-blog/scientific-evidence-for-yoga-and-mindfulness-in-schools-how-and-why-does-it-work">http://www.yoga4classrooms.com/yoga-4-classrooms-blog/scientific-evidence-for-yoga-and-mindfulness-in-schools-how-and-why-does-it-work</a>

### GROWTH MINDSET:

NAME	RESOURCE
Information on Growth Mindset	<a href="https://theeducationhub.org.nz/category/school-resources/growth-mindset/">https://theeducationhub.org.nz/category/school-resources/growth-mindset/</a>
Books to support Growth Mindset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• My strong mind: A story for developing mental strength by Niels van Hove</li><li>• Emmanuel's dream: The true story of Emmanuel Ofori Yeboah by Laurie Ann Thompson</li><li>• Bubble Gum brain by Julia Cook</li><li>• Giraffes can't dance by Giles Andreae</li><li>• What do you do with an idea? By Kobi Yamada</li><li>• What do you do with a problem? by Kobi Yamada</li></ul>
An activity about noticing and celebrating child strengths	<a href="https://sparklers.org.nz/parenting/sparklers-home-discover-your-strengths/">https://sparklers.org.nz/parenting/sparklers-home-discover-your-strengths/</a>

## COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

For more information or for further support, please see the list of community partners and agencies below.

**NOTE:** Website links can be accessed by hovering over text that is underlined.

### Health Services

<u>Healthline</u>	Healthline is free health advice and information, anytime, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Interpreter services available if needed – 0800 611 116.
<u>Healthpoint</u>	New Zealand’s national health service directory.
<u>Starship Community Service</u>	Services the ADHB. Phone (09) 639 0200 or visit <u><a href="http://www.starship.org.nz">www.starship.org.nz</a></u> for more info.

### Education Services

Local MOE office.	Contact details for the Auckland offices can be found <u><a href="#">here</a></u> .
<u>Behaviour Crisis Response Service</u>	If you have an extreme event at your school, the Behaviour Crisis Response Service can respond to your emergency.
<u>Learning from home</u>	Distance learning support during COVID-19. Including wellbeing guides – <u><a href="#">here</a></u> .
<u>International Students</u>	Information from the Ministry of Education to support International Students.
<u>ESOL Resources</u>	A range of resources to help teachers and schools support English language learners.

### Family Support Services

#### Family Violence & Children’s Care and Protection

<u>Oranga Tamariki</u>	If you believe a child is in immediate danger, call the Police on 111. If you are worried about a child and want to make a referral or report of concern, call 0508 326 459.
<u>Women's Refugee</u>	National Helpline: 0800 REFUGE / 0800 733 843. Counselling and housing for abused women and their children.
<u>Shine*</u>	Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0508 744 633. Offer domestic violence support and counselling.
<u>Shakti New Zealand</u>	Provides immediate help and support to women, children and youth of Asian, African and Middle Eastern origin who have experienced sexual abuse, domestic violence and discrimination. 24/7 Crisis Line with multi-lingual staff: 0800 SHAKTI / 0800 742 584.

<u>Safe to talk/Kōrero mai ka ora</u>	24/7 Sexual Harm Helpline: 0800 044334 or text 4334
<u>Family Violence Information Line</u>	Family Violence Information Line is part of the 'It's Not Ok' campaign. 0800 456 450 (available 9:00am-11:00pm daily)
<u>Alcohol and Drug Helpline</u>	Offer a 24/7 Helpline (0800 787 797) – all calls are free and confidential.
<b>Parent Support/Other</b>	
<u>Parenting Helpline</u>	Free service, is available 9am – 9pm, 7 days a week – Call 0800 568 856
<u>Asian Family Services</u>	Nationwide face to face or telephone support to Asian families living in New Zealand. Offered language services: English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korea, Japanese, Thai, Vietnamese and Hindi.
<u>Immerse</u>	Immerse is a not-for-profit Charity that works alongside individuals and families to become lasting foster parents.
<u>FairWay Mediation Services</u>	Help families working through conflict, for example disputes on parenting arrangements following separation. Call on 0800 77 44 20.
<u>Strengthening Families</u>	Available for any whānau in New Zealand when more than one community support organisation or government service is or could be required. It is a free service.
<u>Family Works</u>	Provide a range of social services for children, young people, families and whānau, facing challenges in their lives. Presbyterian Church based.
<u>Anglican Trust for Women and Children</u>	Provide a range of services for families/whānau across Auckland – can include emergency housing.
<u>Barnardos</u>	Aotearoa's largest children's charity. Visit their website to find out more.

## Mental Health Services

<u>Mental Health Foundation</u>	<p>Provides an overview of mental health services including crisis services, helplines and support for young people. Contact their information service on (09) 623 4812. They also have specific information on getting through COVID-19 - <a href="#">here</a>.</p> <p>The Mental Health Foundation also provides a <a href="#">Community Directories</a>, which is a list of national and regional community supports.</p> <p>They have also developed this <a href="#">resource</a> - which includes information on <b>what to do in a crisis or emergency</b> and provides a comprehensive list of <b>helplines</b> and other mental health services.</p>
<u>TalkingWorks</u>	Have a directory of counsellors/ psychologists/psychotherapists/play therapists in Auckland – can be searched by speciality (e.g., ASD, Trauma).

## Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

Auckland DHB:	<a href="#">Kari Centre Community Teams / (09) 623 4646</a>
Waitemata DHB:	<a href="#">Marinoto Child and Youth Mental Health Services / 0800 489 555</a>
Counties Manukau Health:	<a href="#">Taunaki &amp; Te Puawaitanga (Child and Adolescent Mental Health) / (09) 265 4000 (4- 18 years)</a>

## Māori and Pacific Service Providers

<a href="#">Whānau Ora</a>	<a href="#">Whānau Ora work with whānau to find the services and support needed.</a> <a href="#">See He Ara Takahinga for a directory of services in Auckland to support Whānau Ora.</a>
<a href="#">Te Puni Kōkiri (Ministry of Māori Development)</a>	Te Puni Kōkiri has <a href="#">information and resources for Māori</a> including <a href="#">Protect our Whakapapa information sheets to keep whānau safe.</a>
<a href="#">Te Rōpū Whakakaupapa Urutā</a>	<a href="#">Te Rōpū Whakakaupapa Urutā (National Māori Pandemic Group)</a> has for information developed by leading Māori medical experts for whānau Māori.
<a href="#">Ministry for Pacific Peoples</a>	The Ministry for Pacific Peoples has information and resources specifically for Pacific peoples.
<a href="#">Pasifika Futures</a>	Pasifika Futures is a Whānau Ora Commissioning Agency. They work with regionally based providers and partners to build the capability and capacity of Pacific families.

## Disability Support and Services

<a href="#">Office for Disability Issues</a>	<a href="#">Have an overview of the current Disability Support Services available in New Zealand. Find this here.</a>
<a href="#">Explore Specialist Advice</a>	National provider of behaviour support for those with disabilities and autism.
<a href="#">Taikura Trust</a>	<a href="#">Provide free needs assessment and service coordination (NASC) in the greater Auckland region.</a>
<a href="#">Disability Connect</a>	<a href="#">Have compiled a list of resources and useful links.</a>

## Other Agencies/Community Services

<a href="#">Refugees as Survivors New Zealand</a>	<a href="#">Refugees as Survivors New Zealand (RASNZ) is New Zealand's leading mental health and wellbeing service for people from refugee backgrounds living in Aotearoa.</a>
<a href="#">Red Cross New Zealand</a>	<a href="#">Red Cross provides a wide range of services to support people in the community.</a>

<a href="#"><u>The New Zealand Foodbank Directory</u></a>	Find a local food bank using the New Zealand Foodbank Directory.
<a href="#"><u>NetSafe</u></a>	Online safety organisation who have resources and tips to help keep children and young people safe online.

## Useful Websites for further Information and Resources

### **Resources for Managing Coronavirus Anxiety**

<a href="#"><u>Kids Health</u></a>	Provides information on coping with worry and anxiety about COVID-19 for children.
<a href="#"><u>Child Mind Institute</u></a>	Has useful information on coping with the Coronavirus and managing worry.
<a href="#"><u>Brainwave</u></a>	Compiled a range of recommended resources to support during COVID-19.
<a href="#"><u>Ministry of Education</u></a>	Useful information on COVID-19 and wellbeing for educators and families.

### **Updates on COVID-19**

<a href="#"><u>COVID-19 Website</u></a>	Provides up-to-date information to support families and businesses during COVID-19.
<a href="#"><u>Ministry of Social Development</u></a>	Website includes information on support available to people who have been affected by COVID-19, including community services and family supports.

### **Resources for children with Additional Needs**

<a href="#"><u>UNC Frank Porter Graham Child Development</u></a>	Their Autism Team have created a comprehensive information pack on 'Supporting Individuals with Autism through Uncertain Times'.
<a href="#"><u>Altogether Autism</u></a>	Information on Autism during COVID-19, including resources recommended by Altogether Autism experts.

## Service and Resource Directories

<a href="#"><u>The Family Services Directory</u></a>	An online nationwide database of family support organization and the services/programmes they offer to support New Zealand families.
<a href="#"><u>Hearts and Minds</u></a>	See Hearts and Minds (formerly known as Raeburn House) for their support services directory.
<a href="#"><u>Health Pages</u></a>	Directory of a wide variety of social services in Auckland.