

# Anxiety & School Return - 10 Ideas



WELCOME BACK  
TO SCHOOL!

# Introduction

As we prepare for the return to school, there are many anxieties from students, staff and families about what happens next and how we can enable our whole school communities to thrive.

I've shared ten ideas here to help you on your way.

I hope these ideas are helpful. Thank you for all you are doing.

Good Luck!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pooky". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'P' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'y'.

Dr Pooky Knightsmith  
Director  
Creative Education

We are so excited... and terrified. Honestly, I think I've forgotten how to teach!

COME BACK  
TO SCHOOLS!





# Help staff first

Before we think about how to support our students and families, we need to look first to our staff. They are excited but exhausted and full of self-doubt. Having had to learn entirely new ways of teaching, the return to the classroom, but not quite as we know it is daunting for many.

Checking in with staff regularly and providing reassurance - perhaps consider buddies or mentors

Making sure staff are aware of where to seek help e.g. Education Support Helpline



**Consider**



Identifying training needs so staff can regain a feeling of mastery in their role



# Work with families

Working closely with families is to everyone's benefit. We're all on the child's team and when we work as a genuine team around the child, that's when the magic happens!

Spending a little time to proactively reach out to targeted families can greatly increase the chance of a child's success; many battles are won or lost before a child ever leaves the house in the morning.

Learn from families - what has worked well during lockdown?



## **Consider**



Listen - a little bit of listening can go a long way in building trust

Signpost support and help to ensure that the basic needs of every family is met. Work with local services and charities as needed. Think Maslow...



# Meet and greet

Think about how to ensure children land well at school. Those first few moments when they arrive are crucial to a successful day.

Consider how you can make this a moment that builds confidence in the child, their family and the staff team, because it sets the tone for the entire day (or week... or term..)

Is there someone who can meet and greet a child who is struggling?

Create routines and rituals around drop off. When it is the same each day it is easier for everyone

**Consider**

What will motivate a child into school...start with an activity that they WANT to engage with



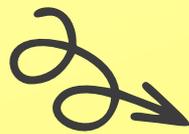
# Belonging and purpose

Celebrate your community being back together and think about how to help every member of the school community to feel part of things again. Reconnect too with your sense of purpose, as a staff team, as a school and as a student body.

Revisit and revitalise your school's mission, vision or values



**Consider**



Create some goals you can all work towards together - maybe fundraising or trying to break a silly record

Consider how to foster a sense of belonging for newer staff and students who've never had time to fully connect with the school yet



# Language of hope

Despair is in the air... let's replace it with the language of hope. There are many reasons to be cheerful; whilst there may be some gaps in learning, our children have developed a whole range of other skills, hobbies and interests they might not have in normal times.

Learn positive lessons from lockdown and inspire confidence about the future.

Children and families need you to be hopeful for them, they can't do it without you

Reflect on the last year - what are the positives?

**Consider**



What can we let go of in terms of old expectations in order to make space for the bits that matter most now?



# BE safe and FEEL safe

Your school community needs to not only BE safe but to FEEL safe too. We can often fall down here, doing careful risk assessments and taking careful steps to ensure that no-one is put at risk, but failing to communicate what we've done in a way that is heard.

What messages and channels do your school community best engage with?



## Consider



Can you target families of especial concern and address their fears?

There is a safety hierarchy...first staff must feel safe, then parents, then students. Any break in the chain breeds fear in the folk below



# What CAN you control?

There is a lot that we can't control right now and that uncertainty is very tiring and can leave both adults and children feeling anxious about both the present and the future. Try to find some certainty, consistency and predictability by considering what you CAN control and leaning into that.

Routines, rules and regularity help everyone feel a little more settled.

Teach children about the locus of control e.g. I can control my own actions.. I can't control the actions of others



**Consider**



Role model managing uncertainty - this is an important skill for everyone



# Express & explore

Every person has a story to tell about their experience of the pandemic. Whether that story is good, bad or simply kind of boring, we each need to find ways to begin to express that story and to work through the feelings associated with the past year.

By leaning into the creative arts and creating gentle spaces for laughter and listening we can help everyone begin to process things.

Space and materials to create is often enough - trust in the process



## Consider



Try free writing  
/ drawing or  
play - brains  
take us where  
they need to go

Ask your support staff for resources and ideas, they will be full of them



# Keep in touch

Learn lessons from lockdown about the different ways we can keep in touch with families and try to continue to use these channels to communicate back home.

Families will need reassurance on the every day and on a deeper level. There is so much guilt, shame and worry - hearing that their child is thriving back at school and understanding how to help at home will help us all to build back stronger.

What worked well in terms of keeping in touch during lockdown?

A little support for families goes a long way in improving outcomes for a child



**Consider**



You have the chance to press the reset button on your relationship with families. What would you like things to look like?



# A chance to succeed

Children are aware of the language of loss around them right now. Many are worried about their futures, are concerned about how behind they are and are worried about how they'll manage back in the classroom. They need realistic expectations, clearly communicated and a chance to chalk up some early successes.

Build 'I Can' cycles for every child;  
success however small, breeds  
success



**Consider**



Beware testing -  
children will perceive  
failure even if you're  
just trying to baseline

Success comes in many forms - be  
imaginative in the success you choose to  
mark and celebrate

We've missed the  
children so much. We  
just can't wait to all be  
together again

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