

SUPPORTING YOURSELF AND YOUR CHILD/REN DURING TRANSITIONS

A tip sheet for parents and caregivers

Along with many other aspects of daily life, the physical closure of schools came upon us quickly, with little chance to prepare. Overall, most children, young people, and their whānau are adapting to the challenges of ‘bubble’ life and learning, and working at home. They are displaying resilience and creativity. As we move between alert levels, ongoing changes and uncertainty are expected. What we do know is that face-to-face learning in centres and schools will be different. The differences will continue to evolve as the wider situation changes.

TRANSITIONS AND WELLBEING
It is a time to pause and take stock. It is a time to expect and accept much less from yourself and your children, adjusting both priorities and expectations.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Each transition will take time to process and adjust to. Physical distancing and increased hygiene practices will be required for some time. Your children may be in smaller ‘bubbles’ that may not include their friends. Breaks may be staggered, with restrictions to activities and equipment. Some children and young people will be worried about the changes ahead. The text box on the right lists some behaviours that might suggest your child needs some extra support and some things you could do to help.

Many children and young people will also be looking forward to reconnecting with friends, teachers, and centre or school routines, as well as extra curricula activities, such as sport and cultural groups. You may share your child/ren’s concerns and hopes, while also having some of your own. As you prepare for the changes ahead, it will help if you work alongside your children and their teachers as much as possible.

PREPARING YOURSELF

Children and young people often look to the adults in their lives for guidance on how to respond and manage their reactions to a given situation. Adults who model calm and functioning behaviours provide children and young people with the leadership and support needed to transform adversity into resilience.

Take time to reflect and acknowledge your own experience. It is likely that you faced at least some upheaval and stress, and increased demands. You may also have experienced treasured and creative ‘bubble’ time, finding strength and innovation when you thought you had none left. Prioritising your wellbeing can benefit your whole family and support. You can find ideas in the Wellbeing Guide, [Module 1, Tip Sheet 3](#).

BEHAVIOURAL CONCERN	SUGGESTED SUPPORT
Separation anxieties	Prepare your child, set up routines, and offer transitional objects like a favourite toy. Focus on security with parent(s)/caregiver(s) and building your child’s connection with teachers and other carers.
Fears around COVID-19	Share facts and empower your child with opportunities for positive action. Extend their critical literacy and have calm conversations. (See the Tip Sheets in Module 1 .)
Anxiety or avoidance of school	Address any needs around friendship, schoolwork, or bullying. Educate your child about anxiety. Empower them through opportunities to make their own choices, preparation, and plans. (Hey Sigmund)
Problematic gaming (solitary or interfering with daily life or return to school)	Identify the function of gaming, find alternative ways to meet needs. Encourage balance of activities, prioritise sleep and physical activity. Keep gaming in sight (not behind closed doors). Together keep a record of gaming or monitor usage and develop strategies to mediate use and manage harms.

PREPARING YOUR CHILD

- **Know your stuff:** Make yourself familiar with up-to-date information from your school and the [Ministry of Education](#).
- **Where we have been:** Talk with your child/ren about their experience of the lockdown, including their feelings, needs, and especially, their strengths. Share your observations of how they have adjusted and their valuable contributions towards bubble life. Tell them how confident you are in their capacity to deal with the changes ahead and the school's ability to manage. Acknowledge your own journey and celebrate the strengths and achievements of life in your bubble.
- **Use what is familiar:** When talking to your child/ren, share an image or story about change that they know or can relate to. For younger children, you could explain social distancing by comparing it to butterflies and encouraging them to keep two wingspans apart when playing. For older children, find out how they feel about returning to school and what they know already. Contribute any other information or resources you think would be helpful.
- **Connect and be connected:** Keep talking with your child/ren about school, including friends and activities. If possible, connect to their 'important people'. Address any worries about separation by focussing on parting rituals and later re-connection: *When I see you after school, we will play a boardgame together.* Consider a transitional object or ritual, such as a comforting snack in the lunchbox. Help them explore their feelings about returning to school. Provide validation that indeed, it could be an awkward or uncertain time *and* you have every confidence in their capacity to cope.
- **Same, but different:** Together with your child/ren, consider what parts of the transition may be the same or predictable. Ask them what differences they are aware of/expect, sharing information relevant for their age. Offer choices about any part of the situation that is negotiable.
- **Future smart planning:** Take time to think about practical ways you and your child/ren can do to get ready. It might be simple things, like getting the bags and lunchboxes out and choosing what to wear. Or, for older children, looking through the schoolwork that has been done and what needs to be taken to school.
- **Wellbeing agenda:** Practice gratitude or mindfulness, develop a family creative project, or take actions that create health and wellbeing, such as getting more sleep, changing screen or media habits, improving nutrition, increasing time outside, or having meals together. Keep your expectations simple, and just take one step at a time.

KNOWING THE RISKS

For most children and young people, the social and emotional experiences of COVID-19 are not expected to cause long-term wellbeing and mental health issues. However, it may make worse existing vulnerabilities for some, especially those exposed to secondary stresses such as loss of household income and/or increased tension. These children and young people may respond to transitions with mood swings or changes in behaviour, like withdrawal or excessive gaming. They may find returning to school somewhat harder and may require firm but calm and empathetic leadership and support from parent(s)/caregivers and teachers. If you need extra support, talk with their teacher and available health services. If the problems are new and you are seeking help for the first time, refer to the [Tip Sheet 3, Module 1](#) for suggested resources and services.

