

Managing Change:

Supporting Children Going Back to School

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a challenging time for families. Children and their parents have balanced school, work, and play while dealing with anxieties and worries about the pandemic. Similarly, returning to school presents its own challenges and adjustments for the entire family. However, by planning ahead, you can help your child make the adjustment into their school routine and ease them into any changes that it may bring.

Preparing your child mentally for the transition back to school

Returning to the school environment and reuniting with friends after time away may be exciting to your child. But it may also feel uncomfortable after such a long period of time. Talk to them about what they are looking forward to and what concerns they may have about going back to school.

- **Act as a sounding board.** Try to listen without immediately offering opinions or advice. Sometimes just talking about a problem or issue can help children develop solutions of their own.
- **Take your child's concerns seriously.** Remember how demanding academic and social pressure can be even without the additional stress of the return. Be careful not to dismiss or trivialize their concerns.
- **Share some of the feelings and experiences you're going through where appropriate.** In an age-appropriate way, talk about your own worries about the relaxation of lockdown rules and what you are doing to help you cope. Doing so may create an open environment to help your child share their own thoughts and concerns.
- **Keep talking to your child about anything and everything.** Grab opportunities to discuss important issues, but also ask simple questions like, "How was your day?" Do everything you can to maintain a strong bond and keep the lines of communication open so they feel they can discuss things openly and honestly with you.
- **Motivate them to learn.** When they return to the classroom, show you are as curious and interested in what your child is learning as you were about their home-schooling work. Get involved and give specific praise such as, "I really like your detail in this project," rather than generic support.
- **Work with your child's school.** Don't be afraid to ask for help. Let the school know if you're worried about anything, or if your child could benefit from extra help in making the transition back from home to school.

For confidential support, free of charge, contact Caterpillar's **Employee Assistance Program (EAP)**:

📞 1-309-820-3604

🌐 EAP.cat.com

📞 1-866-228-0565

🌐 CaterpillarEAP.com

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Practical steps to make the transition easier

Being prepared will help to ease the transition back to school for you and your child. Here are some pointers on what you could consider in preparation for the first day back:

1. **Help your child start getting to bed earlier the week before school begins.** This is never easy but brings benefits for both parent and child.
2. **Brush up on key subjects, like reading and math, together.** This may help ease your child into learning, refreshing them to the point where they left off, and should make the transition into the classroom less anxiety-provoking for them.
3. **Check the school's website.** Look for announcements about last-minute changes and reminders about upcoming events or any specific items the school may wish your child to have.
4. **Get their school clothes and supplies ready.** Leaving this until last minute can cause unwanted stress on back-to-school day!
5. **Shop for groceries in advance of the first week back.** You may also want to plan meals ahead of time, including packed lunches.
6. **Work out before- and after-school care.** As children head back to school, reevaluate your childcare needs. Ensure availability in advance.
7. **Confirm any carpool or transportation arrangements.**
8. **Consider adjusting your schedule or taking the day off, if possible, on the first day of school to ease the transition.** This will allow you to see your child off to school in the morning and to be there after school to talk about the first day's events. Do something fun to mark the transition back to school, like enjoying a special family meal together.
9. **Know your options at work and resolve work-life balance and scheduling concerns.** Be clear on work expectations and policies regarding time off so you will know how to handle emergencies and special events. You may also want to let your manager know that your child is making the transition back to school in case you need to request any flexibility.

Rebuilding your child's confidence and motivation after the time away will be a gradual process. Take it at their pace and build on any small steps made. Be prepared for a wide range of emotions and behaviors. Reach out to the school or Caterpillar's Global Employee Assistance Program (EAP) if you have any concerns about your child's emotional or behavioral responses to returning to school.

Adapted from:

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