

Welcome to a teenager's guide to returning to school

Some people have really enjoyed the break away from school and having time to themselves. Other people are really struggling with the changes in their normal routines and are missing the people and places that they can't see. You might feel like one of these groups or both of them. Or you might feel angry, sad, happy or confused. You might feel all of these at once! You might love school or you might hate school. You might love the online/home learning or you prefer being in the classroom. All of these are also ok.

You might like the routine of school and look forward to seeing all of your friends again. Or you might just feel nervous about the change of going back. Or you might not even know what you are feeling and be overwhelmed by all of the different emotions. All of these feelings towards going back to school again are completely normal and valid. However, the best way of managing the change is to prepare yourself to go back so that everything is less stressful. Here are my top tips in making sure you're looking after yourself now, and how to be ready and prepared:

- It might be helpful to talk to a parent, support worker or trusted friend about how you're feeling, because chances are, they're finding this challenging too. This isn't to take away from the fact that change may or may not be more difficult for you to deal with, but just know that you're not alone in feeling lots of different emotion
- If you find that your emotions are difficult to say, other ways of expressing this such as writing it down or doing something creative such as art can really help to not let you become overwhelmed
- If routine helps you to feel calmer and in control, consider going over your routine of going to school and the different lessons so you know what you should be doing when you go back. Whilst you're still at home, you can still have a routine if that makes things easier. For example, build in times for waking up watching TV, doing school work and maybe going for a walk outside
- Sometimes the uncertainty of what's happening next will make things harder
- Don't feel pressured by what everyone else is feeling and doing. Yes, some people will be exercising twice a day in quarantine and writing a book ! But it's so important to know that it's totally ok if you're just doing what you're comfortable with, it's not a competition!





- If you feel like you would be able and comfortable, staying in touch with your friends is really important as you can support each other. Sometimes, I will facetime my friends and text them, you can also call them if you want

- If you want to, try something new in quarantine. It doesn't have to be massive, something like reading that book you've always

wanted to , or watching a film you've always wanted to see will massively boost your mind and keep you occupied

- Don't become fixated on the news and checking it constantly, because this might build your anxiety. Even though it's good to keep up to date, only checking it a couple of times a day and taking a break from your social media will help to keep anxious feelings manageable for you.
- Make sure you're taking care of yourself and doing the things that make you happy. This involves making sure you're eating regularly and trying to sleep and relax. Making sure that you're physically prepared for the new challenge as this will make the whole experience easier to cope with
- Physical activity can also often help to manage the anxiety and release tension. Using deep breathing exercises to relax can be helpful, and you can download apps such as Headspace that will help you to focus on your breathing. Also, doing physical activities that you enjoy such as playing football and running can really help with managing stress
- Think about the coping strategies that have helped you to cope with big changes in the past, like moving schools, moving house or making new friends. The strategies that you've built can be applied to this change too! Things that really help me to cope with change are making sure I have someone familiar with me, journaling what I'm feeling, sensory and fidget toys and having some time to focus on my special interest. Some other things that can help are listening to music, having time out to allow myself to stay calm and using a weighted blanket when I get super stressed
- Finally, don't put so much pressure on yourself about it! You're bound to have some up and downs before, during and after returning to school, and being hard on yourself about finding it tricky will not solve the problem!

