

# OurSPACE WA

## Foster and Family Care Support Service

### Transitioning back to school

#### 10 ideas to help children transition back to school after the holidays

For many children, returning to school after the extended summer holiday period is a challenging and stressful time. The transition can be even more challenging and stressful for children who live in foster or family care; they have often experienced harm, uncertainty and instability in their lives. These children can be more sensitive to stress and are more likely to perceive threat in their environment; especially the “unknowns” and anxieties that come with change. Their experiences and past relationships have often taught them that the world is a frightening, unpredictable and unsafe place. These children often feel insecure within themselves and their relationships; they can find it difficult to regulate their arousal, emotions and behaviour; and they might find it difficult to trust others to be a source of safety and comfort.

Trauma reduces the capacity of the thinking part of children’s brains to shape the way they react to challenges in their environment; they can become overwhelmed and find it hard to cope with change. Children who live in foster or family care can benefit from proactive support to help with their transition back to school. All children and their needs are different; an understanding of your child will help to guide which of these ideas could be effective to help with their transition back to school.



#### What you can do now...

1. Talk with your child to identify their worries or feelings about returning to school and offer support
  - Provide understanding and reassurance (do this when they feel safe and connected)
2. Try using “wonder statements” (If your child doesn’t want to talk, if they find it difficult to put thoughts or feelings into words, or if they aren’t aware of their worries)
  - For example: “I understand that going back to school is really hard for you.... I wonder if there might be some worries about having a new teacher or not knowing what to expect?”
3. Try using the “What to do with Worries” activity sheet (see attached)
  - It can help to identify worries, provide support through understanding and reassurance and consider actions to manage the worries

## What you can do in the lead up to school...

4. Help to make the “unknowns” as known and familiar as possible
  - Speak with your child about their new teacher, peers in their class and talk generally about returning to school (attend to worries and balance this with positives and hope)
5. Gradually expose your child to the change
  - Make the trip to school and have them try on their uniform several times
6. Return to the “school day” routine at least 1 week before school begins
  - Return to regular bedtimes and wake up times, get dressed and ready in the mornings, etc.



## What you can do in the days before and when school returns...

7. Help to map/plan the day ahead and arrange a meeting spot for pick up
  - “I will drive you to school and walk in with you, we will hang up your bag, I will hug you and say goodbye...”. Get your child to help with the plan (drawings can be useful) and provide some limited choices to help empower them in the process
8. Pack your child’s bag the night before and provide a transitional item
  - Invite them to help to pack the bag. A transitional item is something they can take with them to provide comfort; a way for your child to stay connected with you and to understand you are keeping them in mind (tell them this). Or talk with your child about how you will be thinking of them on their first day and how you are looking forward to hearing about their day after school.
9. Help to identify support people and strategies if they are stressed
  - Let your child’s teacher know that the transition back to school is challenging; consider how your child can access supportive relationships within the school and share tips on what their teacher or your child can do to help to manage stress
10. Allow plenty of time to get ready in the morning
  - Rushing around can be more stressful for everyone. Some extra time will allow an opportunity to revisit the plan for the day and to provide emotional support

Many of these ideas will need to be repeated or revisited several times to help your child become increasingly familiar with the idea of returning to school and reassured by the support they have.

If you are a Foster or Family Carer with the Department of Communities who is requiring some extra support or assistance around caring for a child or around your own stress, OurSPACE WA can provide you with telephone or video counselling and support. OurSPACE WA operates Monday – Friday between 9am – 5pm (excluding public holidays).



**Please call us  
on 1300 381 581**



**Or email us at  
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