

22 July 2020

Dear Parent/ Carers

Preparing children to return to school

The staff team at Hornbeam have been working very hard to prepare for the return of all children in September. Teachers have been busy planning a curriculum of exciting and fun lessons and we are certain that children returning will have a wonderful time. We are excited to be welcoming these children back and look forward to seeing them.

We appreciate that this is a unique time and that for parents/carers and children there may be mixed feelings about a return, that is natural and OK. We are all having to live with change and uncertainty. Many people are feeling more anxious and worried in these uncertain times. This is a completely normal response.

As parents and carers, you will have started to think about the next change; the return to school for your children. For some time, this may come with feelings of relief as it may allow adults to return to work or to feel assured about their child's education. For others it may create a sense of apprehension and heightened anxiety. Again, all these responses are completely normal, and our responses are individual to each of use.

Equally our children may be feeling a similar mix of excitement and worry about returning. One of the best ways to manage change is to prepare for it. You may well already have a plan to support your child to return but we also know that this is a very busy time and so with these things in mind we have put together the following suggestions on how parents/carers might support their child(ren) to return to school.

Overview: Each suggestion below is expanded on in the pages which follow:

1. **Model Calm:** Keep calm and seek support for our worries
2. **Provide a space to communicate:** Do this through activity and open questions
3. **Managing worries:** Reassure, validate and problem solve
4. **Prepare to return:** Talk through changes and share relevant information sent by the school
5. **Prepare for the first day:** Model calm, practice goodbyes in advance, keep goodbyes brief and upbeat
6. **Practice safety measures:** Practice handwashing and social distancing at home in a fun way
7. **Re-establish routine:** Regular bedtimes and meal times can increase a sense of security
8. **Emphasise strengths, hope and positivity:** Share stories of creativity and resilience

Brookfield House Campus

Alders Avenue, Woodford Green IG8 9PY

Tel: 020 8527 2464

Email: office@limeacademyhornbeam.london

William Morris Campus

Folly Lane, Walthamstow E17 5NT

Tel: 020 8503 2225

Email: office@limeacademyhornbeam.london

Hospital & Home Teaching Service

Acorn Paediatric Unit, Whipps Cross Hospital,
Leytonstone, London E11 1NR

Tel: 020 8535 6694

Email: hhts.school@hornbeamacademy.org

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CN: 09297519 **RO:** England and Wales 70–72 New Road, London E4 8ET

www.limeacademyhornbeam.london



1. Model calm

Children are easily susceptible to the worries of adults and therefore it is important that we model calm for them (even if we don't always feel it). As adults this might mean finding our own support to talk through our worries without the children being present. This could be with family, friends, school or via the support services listed in the resources section at the end of these suggestions.

When sharing any of our own feelings with children it is important to do this in a calm manner, in an age appropriate way and in a way which lets children know that we have strategies to manage any feelings of stress or worry. It is a good time to help children to learn about how to cope with worries e.g. talking about it with others, problem solving, relaxation, exercise.

2. Provide space to communicate

Children benefit from having the space to think through questions or worries with their trusted adults. You may wish to provide opportunities for your child(ren) to think about going back to school and for them to share with you any excitement or worries that they may have. Children often feel more relaxed and able to think about these things when doing another activity with you, such as colouring, or whatever you enjoy doing together. Children may spontaneously communicate things that are on their mind during such activities. Some may not and that is ok. You may wish to offer open ended questions during these activities such as 'How are you feeling about going back to school?' and then listen carefully to their response. Some children will not wish to say anything or have anything to say and that is ok. It is important to let your child know that you are available should they wish to talk about anything.

3. Managing worries

Some children might express worries specific to covid-19. Again, it is important to validate these feelings. It is completely normal to feel worried at this time. We can help children to manage these worries by reassuring them that it is the adult's job to keep them safe and that there are also things that they can do to help keep themselves safe. You can tell them about the safety measures that have been taken to keep everyone safe. Children may also feel reassured to know about all of the hard work being undertaken by teachers at school to make the school as safe as possible. Reminding children of the steps that they can take to keep themselves and other people safe, such as handwashing and following school rules, is important too. This can help children feel more in control and less worried.

We can help children to manage worries by encouraging them to engage in activities which help them to self-regulate can help them to manage stress and worry, such as their favourite hobby, reading, watching their favourite TV programme, baking, colouring-in, exercise.

4. Prepare to return

Children, like adults, feel less stressed when they know what to expect. Talking to your child about what it might be like to be back at school will help. Also, sharing the name of the adults who will be teaching and caring for them will help.

You may wish to involve your child(ren) in getting things ready to return to school. Giving them a role in deciding which water bottle to bring and preparing their uniform. This will help your child(ren) to have a greater sense of certainty and control which can reduce stress and worry.



5. Prepare for the first day

Children who have been learning from home will be used to spending a lot of time with you. Separating from you when they come back to school will be an adjustment for them, some will take this in their stride and for others they may feel a little apprehensive or upset. Please do not worry about this, it is a natural response. However, we know that children are very resilient and usually adjust very quickly. Staff are very skilled at easing any worries and we know that these usually resolve within moments of being in the classroom. If children are upset at drop off it will help them to settle if you remain calm, give them a smile and a brief bit of reassurance by telling them that you feel sure that they will have a lovely day. If you have any specific worries about your child separating from you then please call the school at the beginning of term to discuss your concerns.

6. Practice safety measures

Children will need to take part in all the government recommended health and safety measures such as handwashing and social distancing. Children will benefit from the opportunity to practice these ahead of time, you could do this at home as part of your daily routine and through play.

7. Re-establish routine

Children thrive in regular rhythms or routines. Such routines provide children with a sense of safety and predictability e.g. regular bedtimes and meals, daily schedules for learning and play. In turn, this helps children to manage their emotions.

As families we will all have found our own rhythms during lockdown. Ahead of a return to school re-establishing a routine which fits with the general pattern of the school day will be beneficial to your child(ren). The importance of a regular bedtime to promote a good night sleep is one of the best things that can be done to help children cope with uncertainty and stress. For most of us, a lack of sleep can make day to day things more difficult to cope with.

8. Emphasise strengths, hope and positivity

Children need to feel safe, secure, and positive about their present and future. Adults can help by focusing children's attention on stories about how people have come together, found solutions to difficult problems, and overcome adversity during the pandemic. Talking about these stories can be healing and reassuring to children and adults alike.

Hopefully, you will find these suggestions helpful, but remember, they are just suggestions. You are the expert on your child and your family. We are here to support you in any way that we can.

Resources:

<https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/>

<https://www.childline.org.uk/toolbox/calm-zone/>

<https://mentalhealth-uk.org/help-and-information/covid-19-and-your-mental-health/>

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Antony Clements'.

Antony Clements
Interim Headteacher