



How to help your introvert return to the classroom

The COVID-19 pandemic is testing our collective resilience. Many of us are working from home while managing our children, and possibly even educating them, with no real break in sight. It has been exhausting. However, there has been one positive discovery during this pandemic: Your introverted child has excelled through Zoom and online learning.

While you may have found this success surprising, many experts say that it's not. Schools, by their very nature, appeal to the extrovert with the opportunity for participation – in the classroom, on the playing field, in the school band. Conversely, introverts tend to prefer more quiet environments.

Now your introvert may be returning to the classroom. Below are some tips on how you can help your introverted child manage that return.

- Learn why your child is happy to be out of school. What makes school difficult? Boredom? Challenges in getting work done in the more traditional classroom?

- Consider outdoor and social activity, which may require more prompting, but will make the transition back to social settings easier once those transitions are necessary.
- Maintain a schedule so that a lack of structure doesn't become the norm. Have clear expectations about time devoted to schoolwork, chores, bedtime, mealtimes, etc.
- Encourage memories of good times from school. Try to focus attention on the aspects of school that are being missed, such as teacher support and acknowledgements. As a corollary to this, ask your child why he/she thinks society considers it important for kids to attend school.
- Have a plan for the return to school. Visualize what it will involve, what it will require, and problem-solve possible situations that might arise when he/she returns.
- Consider a reward system that is age and situation-appropriate—i.e., where something is earned after in-classroom school is attended for X number of days straight.

The above are hands-on tips for preparing for back to school. But what about the ongoing anxiety your child may be feeling about the return to school and the pandemic in general? There are steps you can take to manage that as well.

- Understand their worry and acknowledge that going back to school will feel hard. Recognize that it's not realistic to eliminate anxiety about it. Focus on reassuring your child that he/she can handle challenging situations as he/she has done in the past.
- Remind your child (and yourself) that these times are not permanent. Pandemics have an end, and no one plans to live in a socially distant world indefinitely.
- Be mindful that your child will pick up on your emotions. If you're feeling stressed, he/she will likely reflect this as well. Try to frame anxieties as problems that can be solved (i.e., handwashing and scientists working on a vaccine).