

Covid-19, Covid-19 and going back to school or nursery.

Dr Sian Barnett, from Islington CAMHS, has recorded a helpful video for parents and carers considering the impact of returning to school or nursery. The video is [here](#).

Staff may find the CAMHS video useful to watch and discuss to support their work with parents. ***Please send the link out to parents for them to watch.***

The script is below for reference.

Key messages and timings

1. Everyone's experience is different (1:04)
2. Look after yourselves (3:24)
3. Find out about your child's experience and what they might be feeling (4:37)
4. Prepare your child for changes including the return to nursery or school (7:20)
5. Seek more help and support if you or your child need it (9:30)

Introductions

Hello. My name is Sian Barnett and I am a Clinical Psychologist. This means that I talk to children, their families, as well as school and nursery staff about how they are, any difficulties and challenges they are facing, but also what they like and think is going well.

I manage the Islington Child and adolescent mental health, or CAMHS in schools team with Joe Hickey, and the Early Years Team with Andia Papadopoulou, as well as the Children's Centre and Parenting Groups Teams. Joe and Andia are also Clinical Psychologists.

I want to talk to you today about Covid-19 and children returning to nursery and school. I won't talk about the practical issues around safety and covid. I will leave that to schools, the scientific and medical community, and the government. I will focus on some thoughts that my team and I have about the experience of covid, and the impact that going back to school, in the context of covid, might have on children and families. There are also some behaviours we think that parents and nursery or school staff might see and that it would be helpful to consider.

Everyone's experience of Covid-19 is different

I want to acknowledge the huge impact that covid has had on the lives of so many people, not just in this borough, or country, but all over the world. No one thought that an illness would lead to us having to change the way that we live our lives, so suddenly, separate us from loved ones and create so much uncertainty and challenge. It is therefore not surprising that many adults and children might feel a mixture of and changing emotions at this strange time.

A wise person reflected that we are perhaps all in a similar storm, but the reality is many people will have felt closer to the eye of that storm, depending on how covid has affected them and the people around them. The storm will feel different to you depending on whether you have been ill, or you know someone that has been ill, or shielding, if you are worried about loved ones or have been sadly bereaved by this illness, whether you work or not and where. For instance if you are working in a hospital, or if you, or a partner has lost your job. It will depend on your past experiences, mental and physical health, your family relationships, the age and developmental stage and needs of your children. These factors are also likely to affect your children.

I also think that we need to consider that we are in different boats in this storm. The boat may be bigger or smaller, with less or more facilities, and outdoor space. Some people are in their boat alone, whilst others have a large family in there with them. How that boat feels will depend a bit on how it is tossed about in the

Covid-19, Covid-19 and going back to school or nursery.

covid storm. What impact it has had on your employment, finances, and support system inside and outside the boat. We know that some people are working full time from home others are still going into work and some people are not able to do their jobs at home or do not work. Everyone who has children is trying to provide care and some education to their children. Teachers are also often parents and they are affected by the same events and experiences as the rest of us. They are trying to find a way to teach children remotely and get them back into the classroom.

On top of this, many parents will be understandably worried and confused by the advice around returning to school, and may be concerned about safety, in the context of Covid. Many of you will be thinking about how to talk to your children about covid and about nursery or school.

Parents please look after your selves

Some of you as parents will be happy to stay at home together with your children, seeing how your children are enjoying additional parent time and attention, which we know can help children to grow and develop. However, many of you and many of your children, might be bored, frustrated, concerned about missing out on learning, cooped up, worried or anxious about the present or future, and as parents you may be struggling to juggle work, childcare, and household jobs, or just managing so much time at home together. It is important to be kind to yourself whatever mixture of thoughts and feelings you are experiencing. There are no wrong thoughts or feelings. Try to look after yourself as a parent, talk to other parents or friends and family. If you can, share your worries and concerns and practice some self care, even if you can only carve out a few minutes for yourself during the day. Try doing one thing that is just for you. If you can do more great! Looking after yourself is like putting your own oxygen mask on first on a plane. You have to look after yourself to be able to look after your children, so don't put yourself last. If you need additional help please give yourself permission to access it.

Find out about your child's experience and what your child is thinking or feeling

Like you, your children will have had different experiences of Covid, depending on their school year they may have missed out on, or be worried about missing endings and rites of passage. Moving from nursery to school, or from primary to secondary school. If they were due to take exams and then celebrate with friends. They may be very sad and feel like they have missed out on something that they were working towards for years and looking forward to, that they cannot get back. They may feel relieved but experiencing an anticlimax and worry about what it means for their future. School staff will be thinking carefully about how to mark changes, endings and new beginnings for these pupils.

It is important to talk to your children about how they are feeling. There are no right or wrong thoughts or feelings for your children either. We try to help children to recognise and understand different feelings and then learn ways to cope with difficult feelings, with adult help.

Particularly with young children, but also with older children, you might wonder about their feelings. If you ask and they can't or won't tell you, try guessing from the situation, their facial expressions and behaviour. 'I think you might be happy, because your brother shared his toy/ let you have a go on the console.' 'It sounds like you might be feeling really sad because you are missing your friends. I know it is really hard for you that you can't see them at the moment and I am really sorry about that.' 'You look like you might be worried when I mention school.. do you want to talk about it/what's on your mind?.' 'You look really angry that your sister just mentioned your exams. I understand you feel that way.'

You can use stories, puppets, teddies and toys to help younger children express and talk about their feelings. Play is how young children make sense of their world so sit down on the floor with them and let them tell you what to do and how to do it and just describe what you see them doing without interfering or asking questions. a bit like a sports commentator. You can model talking about your own feelings too and some problem solving or ways of managing. It is best not to over share your feelings with your children but you might say 'I am having a bit of a difficult day. I am feeling a bit bored with staying at home all the time, or I

Covid-19, Covid-19 and going back to school or nursery.

am a bit frustrated with this task. I think it might be a good idea to go out for a walk and get some fresh air...’ or what do you think I could try?..’ Praise children for naming their feelings or coming up with good ways to manage boredom, frustration, for calming down, or carrying on with a difficult piece of work. It is the effort, not the end result that counts.

With older children and teenagers make yourself available to talk and continue to talk to them. Text them if they find it easier to start a conversation that way. Give them space but remember they still need you even if they might tell you otherwise. meal times, walks and bedtime can be a good time to spend together and listen.

Prepare your child for the changes to come

If your child is in nursery or one of the year groups returning to school it will be important to start to prepare them for returning. If you are taking your child back to school try to show them that you are positive about their return, stay calm and be enthusiastic.

Most children and adults need time to adjust to a change in their routine. Start to talk to them about school, what do they remember, what have they missed? maybe share something that you remember to start the conversation, and talk about their school friends. You might want to look at photos. It can help to do the walk or journey to nursery or school in advance as a way of returning in stages, particularly if you think the transition might be difficult for your child. Be prepared to ask about and listen to any worries your child might have about going back. Ask them if they have any questions. You might be surprised by what you hear but don’t dismiss or make your child think anything they say is silly. Take their questions and concerns seriously, listen carefully and let them know you will try to answer. There are some things we don’t know the answers to even as grown ups and will try to find out. Some things will be worked out as we go.

Some children might worry about: leaving you; the work they have missed; or how many times they may be asked to wash their hands; catching the virus, or family getting ill. Try to let them know that it is very unlikely that they will be unwell and if they are they will get better quickly. Alongside this video we have some useful resources to help talk to children about covid. If your child was bullied or struggled with work, playing with or getting on with peers, or with attending school, think about what will help them, and ask what they think will help them. At the same time ask the school to help monitor, support your child and put any practical strategies in place in the classroom that they can. It can be helpful to have a named person they trust who they can talk to or sit with.

Teachers may contact you and your child, before you return, to see how you are and to let them know they have been thinking about you. If they can’t do this they will let your child know, when they see them, that they have been thinking about them and are glad to have them back in school, and will monitor how they are.

Children’s reactions to returning to school

Some children may be tearful, have tantrums, or even bigger tantrums, show an increase in aggressive/oppositional behaviour, become very quiet and withdrawn or appear very anxious and even refuse to go back to school. Other children may regress to an earlier developmental stage, so a child may be more fearful of separation from you, seem more childish than their years, and cling and cry or even start wetting again once toilet trained. For most children this will be a temporary reaction to the uncertainty and change in their routine. They will benefit from a patient approach, and for you as a parent and for their keyworker or teacher to be alongside them, continued quality time and parental attention, lots of love and understanding about how difficult it is as well as clear routines, rules and expectations from you. It can be really hard as a parent if your child is distressed so plan how you will prepare and talk about it in advance. Take gradual steps if necessary and if your child needs an extra incentive to help manage the transition, consider using a system of no-cost or low cost rewards to encourage them.

Covid-19, Covid-19 and going back to school or nursery.

Talk to your child's teachers about your plan and check in regularly, weekly or daily, if necessary, so that they know how your child is at home and they can share your approach for supporting your child, in school or nursery, and let you know how your child is coping.

Seek more help if you or your child need it.

Most children will enjoy the return to school or nursery, although it may seem strange at first, the structure, routine, learning and social interactions will be reassuring and familiar and will nurture and support your child. However, if you or school staff remain worried that your child continues to be distressed after a few weeks then please talk about this.

Some reasons to seek help include: You are worried about your child's behaviour, emotional well being or development. If your child is showing signs of significant anxiety such as panic attacks, or being in a continuous state of worry that is causing them distress. They continue to refuse to go to school despite a gradual return. If older children and adolescents are reporting seeing or hearing things that are not there. If there is a significant deterioration in their mood, sleep or eating. If they are showing repetitive behaviours that are interfering with daily life. If you think that your child is self harming please contact your GP during office hours and let the school know. If you are worried about risk of immediate injury to your child, or your child needs urgent medical attention please contact or go to your local A and E. You can contact your GP and for younger children your Health visitor.

We have a CAMHS clinician connected to all Islington nurseries and schools. If you talk to the school about your concerns, teachers can discuss with the children's centre or school clinician to consider what might be helpful. Islington also has a central Point of access for Social, Emotional and mental Health difficulties and an advice line (020 7527 7400). Bright Start Islington also provide family support surgeries every weekday (020 7527 5959) and Families First (020 7527 4343) are available to support families around parenting and the practical difficulties that you might need help with as a result of Covid-19.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to watch the video or read this.

Please be well and look after your selves and your families.

Dr Sian Barnett Islington CAMHS, the Schools and Early Years Team

- [Central point of access for social, emotional and mental health](#): Please call 0207 527 7400 between 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday or complete the [referral form](#)
- [Bright Start Islington](#) 020 7527 5959
- [Families First](#) 020 7527 4343

Additional links and resources

There are lots of resources to support children, young people and families available on the Islington [website](#).

In addition:

- This is an easy read article from Mencap: <https://www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/Information%20about%20Coronavirus%20ER%20UPDATED%20130320%20SD%20editsAH.pdf>
- A social story: <https://www.facebook.com/triplea.wicklow/photos/pb.581903728610422.-2207520000./1825656457568470/?type=3&theater>
- Video for children <https://www.brainpop.com/health/diseasesinjuriesandconditions/coronavirus/>



Covid-19, Covid-19 and going back to school or nursery.