

# REDUCING (BACK-TO) SCHOOL ANXIETY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

*Many children are experiencing increased anxiety over returning to, and being in, school during COVID-19. Children may struggle with anxiety while wearing a mask, usually stemming from trauma or a sensory disability. Taking a gradual approach with positive support and structure will facilitate the reduction of (back-to) school anxiety, learning gaps, and mask anxiety.*

## Back-to-school Anxiety



Try not to overemphasize the potential dangers of school to children. While still adhering to all safety precautions, attempt to make the experience as normal as possible with routine and structure.



Unless you are concerned for your child's health or safety, do not give in to pleas to stay home from school. Allowing the child to stay home may only confirm that school is unsafe and increase anxiety.



Support the individual academic, social, and emotional needs of each child based on their circumstances, as opposed to a one-size-fits-all approach.

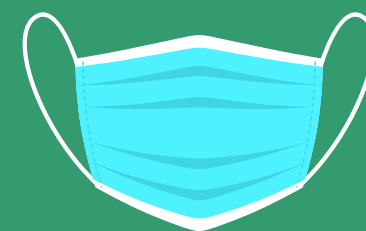


Praise children for being courageous and for any effort put into academics, regardless of whether success has yet to occur.

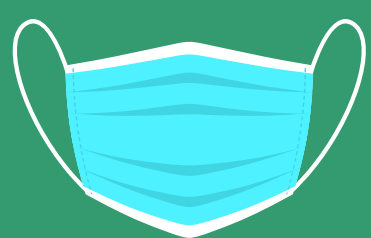
## Mask Anxiety



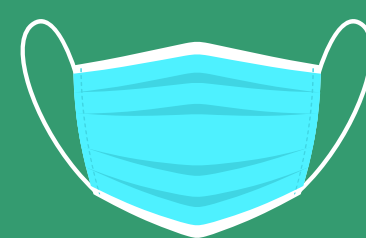
Specific to young children, demonstrate mask wearing on a beloved person or object, such as a stuffed animal, doll, or role model family member.



Practice slower and deeper breathing. Wearing a mask may unintentionally activate shallow breathing, which may induce anxiety.



Practice wearing a face mask at home for the feeling of comfortability and safety. Gradually introduce mask wearing in low stress public environments for short periods of time to experience success in public mask wearing.



Chew gum, suck on a candy, or lightly spray fabric scent on the inside of the mask for distraction and improved smell underneath the mask.

# REDUCING ONLINE LEARNING ANXIETY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

*As many children and youth continue to learn remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic, burnout and anxiety may increase. Caregivers and teachers have an influence on these feelings and can support children and youth to feel as calm and collected as possible during these unprecedented times.*

## Strategies for Caregivers

### Webcam Anxiety

Ask the child's teacher for permission to turn off the child's video and/or not to call out or on the child in their virtual class.

Remind the child that if they feel uncomfortable, they can turn off their video feed and continue to participate.



### Validate and Match Emotions

Avoid toxic positivity. Validate all things students are feeling in an honest way. Try to match their emotions and intensity when they become upset, then revert to a calm voice when discussing the solution. This will show them they are not alone in their feelings, and that it is possible to calm down and regain control.



### Plan Ahead

Create a plan to not only structure the day, but also to prepare for any potential emergencies ahead of time. Store back-up files of all assignments, create a calendar to meet deadlines, and create a daily agenda or to-do list for each class. Schedule and routine can significantly reduce anxiety.



### Think Outside of the Box

Validate other ways to learn than through a screen. Allowing the child to be the banker in a game of Monopoly, reading comic books, writing their own short stories, and participating in DIY science projects for kids can all contribute to core learning goals.



## Strategies for Teachers

### Individual Connections

If possible, try to phone or Zoom chat with several students individually each day, meeting with each student once before the week is over.



### Utilize The Village

Support students to identify the helpers. Utilize school personnel and other community members to try to avoid some students falling through the cracks.



### Express Understanding

Focus on what is being learned versus what assignments are being accomplished. Recognize any new skills the child is demonstrating and validate unique learning experiences. Encourage caregivers to communicate if the level of work is too much.



### Mental Health is Education

Continue to weave mental health awareness into curriculum through teaching skills such as mindfulness and grounding. Children and youth learning to take care of themselves is still a form of education that will benefit them throughout their lives.



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