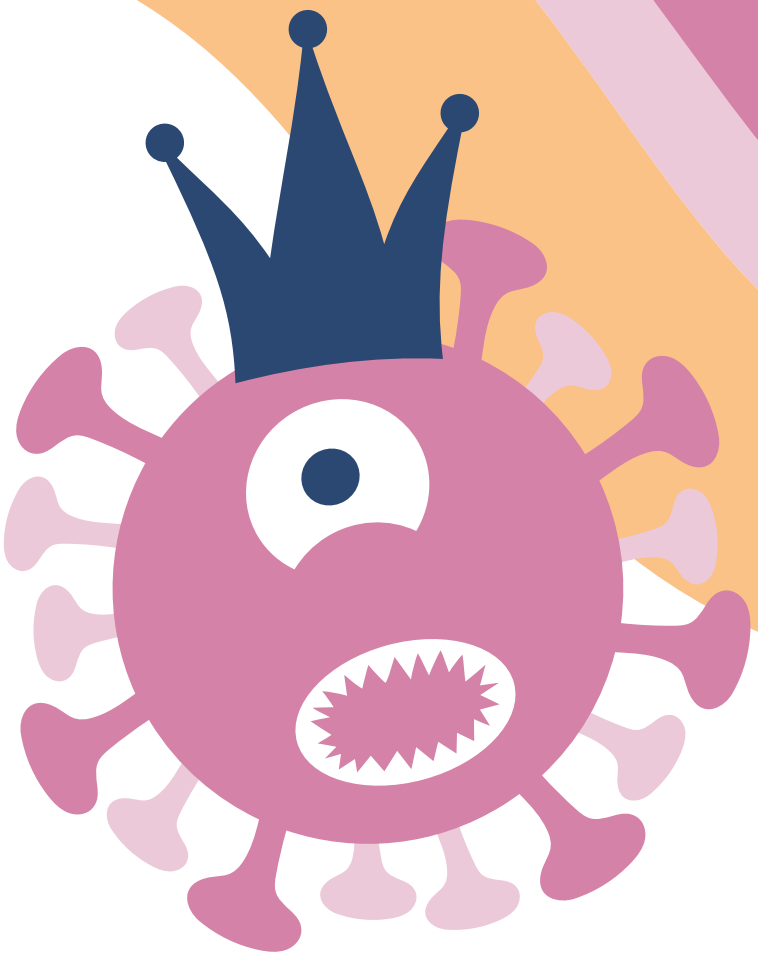
NHS Education for Scotland

It's ok to worry about going back to school

A resource pack **for parents** of neurodiverse children to help with going back to school



NHS Grampian



This pack was created by the Early Intervention team in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) in NHS Grampian

Contents

Part 1: How this pack can help

What do we mean by neurodiverse? 03
How this pack can help 04

Part 2: Planning ahead

Changes at school 06
Supporting new changes and routines 09
Talking about going back to school 12
Planning ahead 14
'Practice run' poster 16
Physical distancing circles 17
Expectations at school 19

Part 3: Going back to school

Winding down time 21
Feeling anxious about going back to school 22
Helping your child manage anxiety around going back to school 23
Emotion chart 24

Part 3: Additional resources

Additional resources 26

Part 1:

How this pack can help

What do we mean by neurodiverse?

In this pack, we use the term neurodiverse to refer to children who require additional support and/or have a neurodevelopmental condition.

Neurodevelopmental conditions include:

- Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC)
- Learning Disability (LD) or Learning Difficulties
- Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)

This is not an exhaustive list.

Neurodiverse children typically require additional support with their learning and understanding of their world around them.

For some neurodiverse children, the transition back to school may require scaffolding and support from parents, guardians, and teachers to help them understand this transition and any changes that may occur.



How this pack can help

The Scottish Government has advised it is safe to re-open schools in Phase 3. Your child will return to school when you and your child's school decide the time is right. The gradual return to school might require you and your child to make some adjustments to the routine you have created due to COVID-19.

All guidance taken from the Scottish Government in this pack was correct as of 17th July 2020. You may find some guidance has changed – please see the Scottish Government website for most up-to-date guidance:

www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19

Your child's school may adopt different practices to other schools. Speak to your child's school to find out more information.

Your child may be experiencing lots of different feelings about going back to school. **All these feelings are normal.**

This pack is designed to help you think about some of the ways you can support your child manage the transition back to school.

The ideas in this pack are for you to put in place at home. Feel free to pick and choose which supports will be helpful for you and your child, and adapt as necessary. You may wish to speak to your child's school about supports that can be put in place at school.

Think about the strategies you used to support your child going to school before COVID-19



Think about the strategies you developed to support your child with the changes caused by COVID-19



As a parent or guardian YOU are the expert at knowing your child best

Part 2:

Planning ahead

Changes at school

Scottish Government guidance:

Physical distancing

Physical distancing at school may look different depending on the size of your child's school, the age and stage of your child, and/or if they have complex needs or disabilities.

Frequent handwashing and hygiene measures

Your child's school will encourage frequent handwashing and will have more frequent cleaning in the school.





Moving around the school

The way people move around the school might be different, such as having one way systems or groups moving at different times. There may be signs to help children learn these new ways.

Holding more lessons outside

Schools are being encouraged to hold lessons outside where possible.

Smaller groups of children in school/ school 'bubble'

Children put into a smaller groups/ school 'bubble' will be at school at the same time and go to lunch and breaks together. This may mean your child does not attend school at the same time as their friends.

Other changes at school

Your child will be transitioning to a new school year. For secondary schools, this will have already happened.

Changes that occur in the new school year in a primary school often include:

- Peers in class
- Class teacher
- Classroom
- Peg area
- Entrance to line up

Things that won't change

Although there will be some changes in your child's school, there are some things that won't change. Letting your child know what these things are may help reduce some anxiety around going back to school.

Examples of things that won't change for your child include:

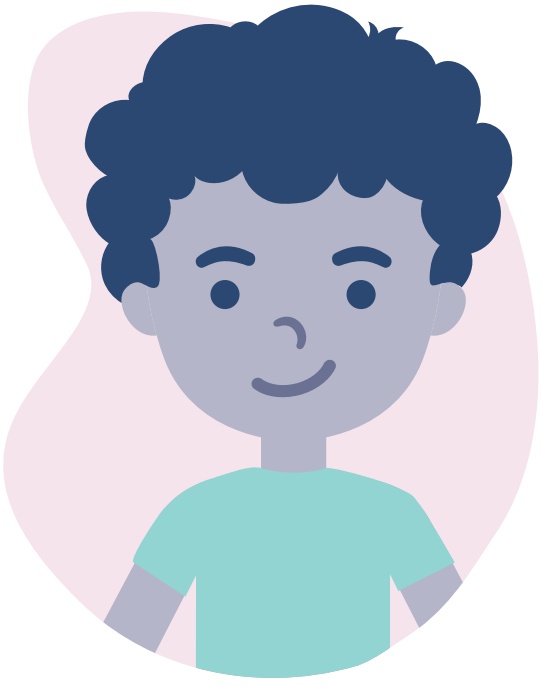
- Their wellbeing will still be a key consideration
- Teachers and friends will be happy to see them
- Continuing to learn i.e. reading, maths, spelling etc
- Being part of a school community. Most schools have school 'houses'
- School rules and expectations (see page 16 for some examples of school expectations)
- Getting breaks and a lunchtime (although this may look different)

Use the table on page 8 to create a list of things that will and won't change at your child's school.

Transitioning to a new school

For some children their return to school will mean a transition to a new school (i.e. nursery to primary, or primary to secondary). **For any child, this transition is a big change and can cause some anxiety.** Let your child know it is normal to worry about change and encourage them to speak to their friends who might be feeling the same. Your child's new school may have provided information about the transition prior to the summer holidays. Speak to your child's new school if you have not received any information yet.

If your child had individual supports in their previous school, their new school should already be aware of these.



Things that will change	Things that will stay the same

Supporting new changes and routines

Neurodiverse children can find changes and transitions difficult. Here are some examples of ways in which you can support your child to manage the transition back to school.

Daily routine

Your child's routine might have changed during lockdown and may need to be adjusted as a result of going back to school. It may be useful to create a morning routine to help your child get ready for school and an afternoon routine for the transition to home. It can be helpful to **involve your child in creating the routine.**

Remember your child will need some time to adjust to the transition of going back to school.

Keep in mind that you may need to adapt your routine further as government advice changes.

Morning routine

- Waking up
- Getting dressed
- Having breakfast
- Getting ready to leave the house i.e. putting your shoes on
- Leaving the house

Afternoon/evening routine

- Going home
- Activities
- Meal times
- Preparing for bed (putting pyjamas on, brushing teeth, etc.)
- Bed time

Visual tools

Visual tools (i.e. Now and Next cards, photos, objects) can be helpful to explain the transition back to school or changes to routines. They may be used to help your child understand:

- Days and times they will be at school
- What they should wear
- What they can and cannot bring to school
- Where they will line up
- What rules they need to follow (e.g. hand washing, physical distancing)

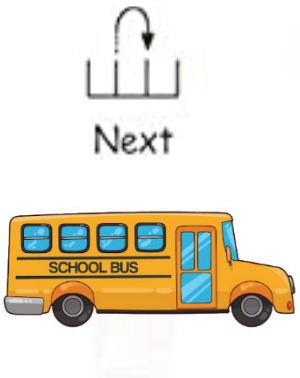
Supporting new changes and routines

Now and Next cards

Now and Next cards can support routines and transition times. If you find your child struggles with a full day timetable, you can use Now and Next cards instead.



Get dressed



School bus

Timers and Countdowns

Timers are good for letting children know how long they have left on an activity. Other options include a simple 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 countdown.

Offering choices

Offering choices may give your child a sense of control. Limit choices to two options as additional options may confuse or overwhelm your child – **think 'this or that'.** Use visual tools where possible as some children with verbal or processing difficulties, or echolalia (repetition, or echoing, of words and sounds) may just repeat the last option.

Using special interests

If your child has a special interest, you may wish to include this when adopting new routines, behaviours and explaining changes. For example, creating timetables and posters using the special interest (e.g. showing SpongeBob and Patrick doing physical distancing at school).

Social Stories

Social Stories explain social situations and help children learn what to expect, what other people might be thinking and suggest ways they can respond. Social Stories are a good way of explaining the transition back to school and any changes that may occur.

Social Stories can help explain:

- Hand-washing routines
- Changes to routines (e.g. returning to school, new morning and afternoon routines)
- Government advice
- Changes at school (e.g. new classroom, changes to the classroom or seating arrangements, new teacher, where to line up)
- School bubbles
- Physical distancing at school

You or your child's school may be using Social Stories already. You could create your own Social Story using photos of your child's school or classroom, or using your child's special interest.

You could use the Social Story and worksheets "Going back to school: This is a story about going back to school after coronavirus lockdown" to talk about going back to school. You can access this on the NHS Grampian CAMHS website:

www.camhsgrampian.org

Talking about going back to school

Gradual preparation and (where possible) predictability could help your child with the transition back to school. The more often things are done in a predictable way, the easier it will be for your child to learn the new way of doing things.

Think about making the information appropriate to your child's developmental stage and needs

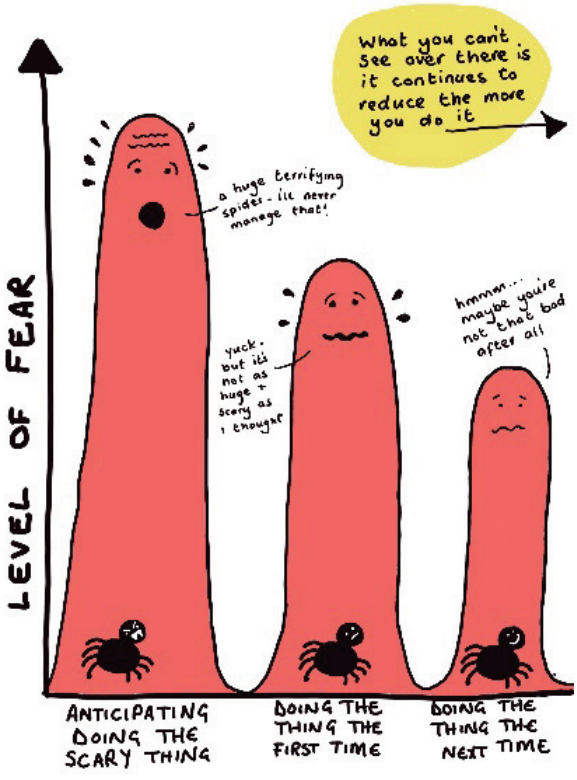
Giving your child information

Think about the amount of information and how long your child needs to process information. Some children may feel more anxious if they know too far in advance about changes. You may also need to repeat information over time, staying calm during this repetition will help your child process the information. Give your child information when they are calm and relaxed.

Talking about going back to school

It's important to talk to your child about going back to school. Find out how they feel about going back to school. Your child could use emojis as a visual tool to help tell you how they feel. See page 24 for an emoji emotion chart.

You could ask them to think about what they will miss about being at home and what they missed about school.



Picture used with permission from
Dr Emma Hepburn @thepsychologymum

Talking about changes

Talk with your child about the changes their school will make. Use the list you created on page 8.

‘Ok not Ok’

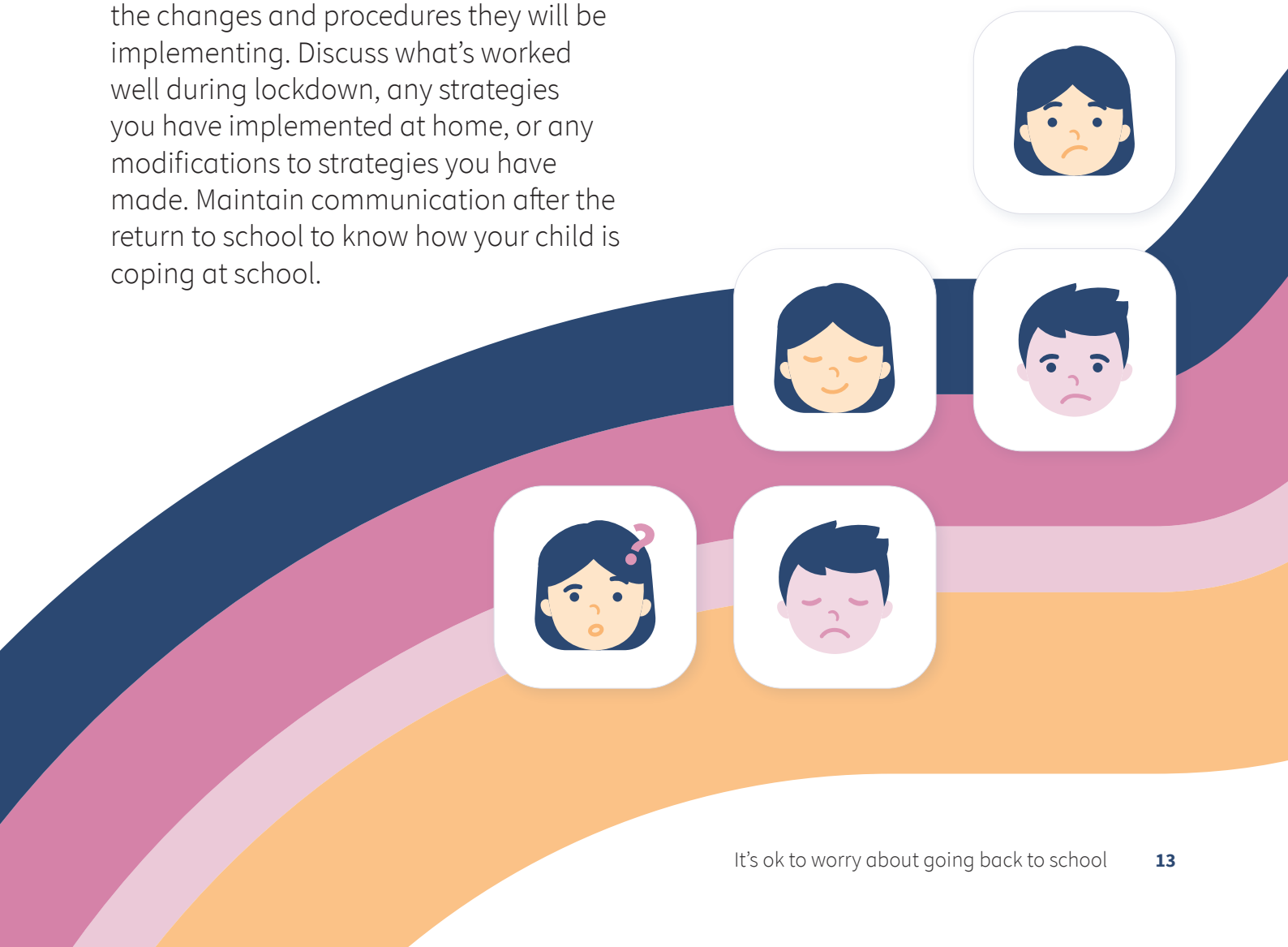
It may be helpful to be clear with your child what is ok to do at school now and what is not ok (i.e. bringing items in from home, giving high 5s). You may wish to use the ‘Ok not Ok’ resource by Third Space – see additional resources on page 28.

Communication with school

It’s important to talk to your child’s school about their return to school. You may wish to speak to your child’s school about the changes and procedures they will be implementing. Discuss what’s worked well during lockdown, any strategies you have implemented at home, or any modifications to strategies you have made. Maintain communication after the return to school to know how your child is coping at school.

It may be helpful to let your child’s school know if your child has experienced any illness, loss or bereavement during the pandemic.

Let them know if your child has any sensory sensitivities or skin conditions that are affected by soap or hand gel.



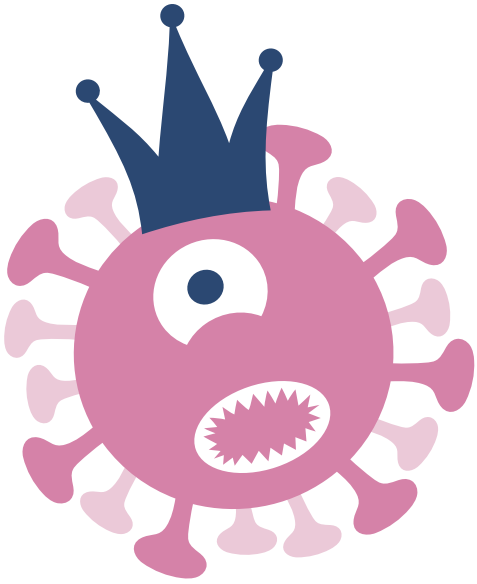
Planning ahead

Difficulties or triggers

You may identify your child has difficulties in certain situations or certain things trigger difficult behaviours or feelings in your child. These may include:

- Sensory overload such as becoming overwhelmed by too much noise, too much visual information, or smells.
- Learning to socialise face-to-face again
- Reduced movement breaks
- Increase in focussing on work
- Adjusting to the changes at school

Make a note of these and think about ways to help your child manage these. Speak to your child's school to plan together.



Calendars & weekly timetables

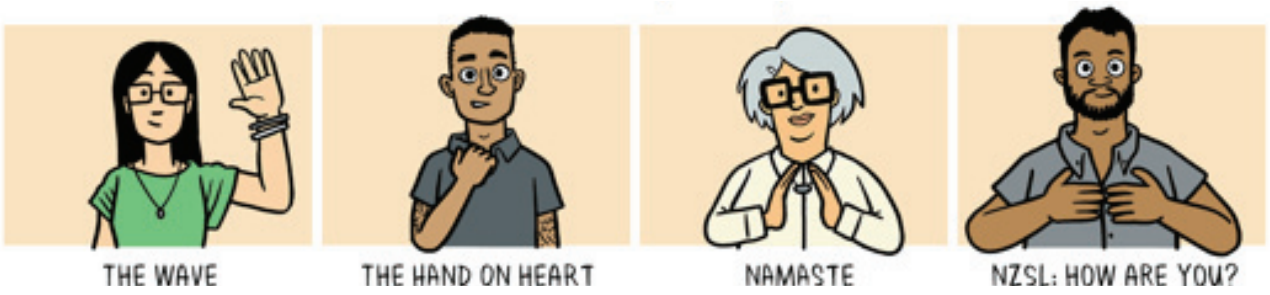
Once you know the date your child will return to school you may wish to mark it on a calendar. Make sure the calendar is at eye level for your child.

Routines

Before your child goes back to school start re-introducing your child's school routine. This could include waking your child up at the time they would wake up for school, and keeping to the same morning and bedtime routines as they have on a school day. Talk about how they will get to and from school, especially if this has changed or if there are other changes required i.e. wearing face coverings on public transport.

Praise and positive talk

Praise encourages children to do behaviours you wish to see and makes them feel good. Use praise and positive talk throughout the preparation and return to school.



Alternatives to hugs

Your child may want to hug their school friends or teachers when they see them. You may wish to create a way your child can show their hug without touching others. There are many alternatives to hugging.

You could also try physical distancing hugs such as a jazz hands, a robot hug (e.g. bent elbows) or a ballerina hug (e.g. arms above their head). You and your child can get creative with this!

See page 17 on physical distancing circles to help your child understand who they can and can't hug at the moment.

Practicing some changes

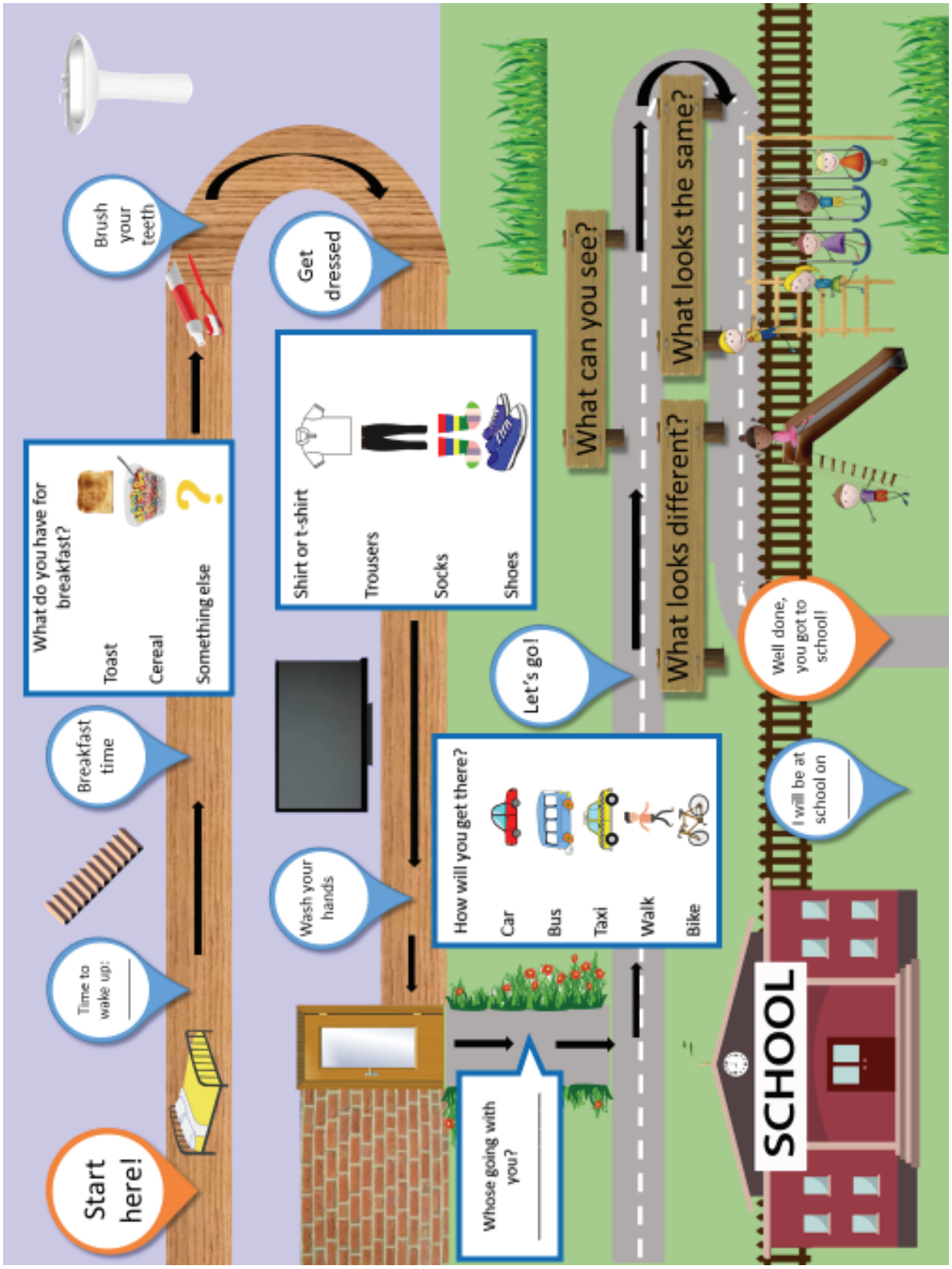
You could practice some of the expected changes with your child. For example, getting them to put face coverings on their teddy bears.

You may wish to have a 'practice run' of the school morning. If you can, drive or walk to the school to familiarise your child with the route. This could include getting your child to wear their school uniform. Having a 'practice run' may not work for every child.



See page 16 for a poster to use when having the 'practice run'

‘Practice run’ poster



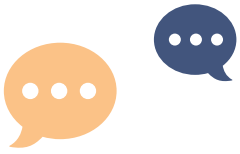
Physical distancing circles

The Scottish Government has advised physical distancing is still required for some children. Some children may struggle to understand or remember who they have to keep their distance from. Physical distancing circles are a visual cue you can use to help them understand physical distancing.

Physical distancing will be different depending on the age of your child

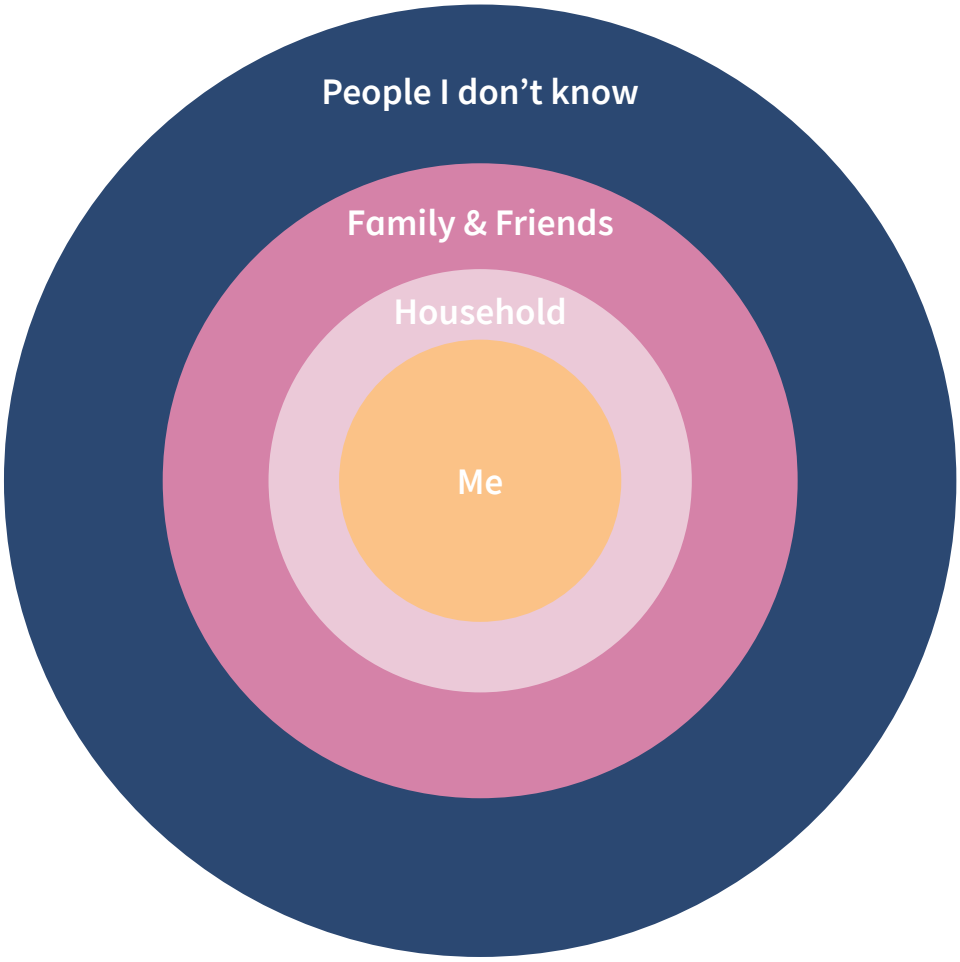
How to create physical distancing circles:

1. Start by drawing a circle on a large piece of blank paper. Write the child's name in the circle and/or stick on a picture of them. Tell your child this is their own personal space and only certain people are allowed to get close to them.
2. Draw another circle and write 'household' in this circle. You can write and/or paste pictures of members of their household in this circle. Remind them it is ok to get close and hug these people if they wish. If your child requires self-care from teachers/PSAs, you may wish to add them here.
3. Next draw a third circle. Label this circle 'friends & family'. Write the names and/or paste pictures of people who fit into this category (e.g. next door neighbours, teachers, family members not in their household). Explain your child may need to keep 2 metres away from these people, depending on your child's age – you may wish to use visuals or examples of how long 2 metres is.
4. Lastly, draw a final circle. Label this circle 'people you don't know'. Explain your child needs to keep 2 metres away from these people.
5. You may wish to add a 'key' to remind your child what they can and cannot do with people in each circle. Make sure to check Scottish Government guidance for advice on this.



You can use different colours for each circle. Label them in terms your child understands or uses.

Here are some examples of physical distancing circles



Hug
Kiss
Share toys

Physical distance hug
Blow kisses to
Draw pictures for

Stay 2 metres away from

Me

Family & Friends

Household

People I don't know

Expectations at school

The home environment is different from the school environment. There are different expectations and rules at school that are not always necessary during home learning.

You may wish to remind your child of some of these expectations and begin to practise these during home learning. You could use the supports on page 6 to support this.

You may wish to speak to your child's school before re-introducing these expectations as every school is different.

Raising your hand

Most schools ask children to raise their hands when they have something to say. You could try a 'pop-quiz' or ask to see if they can find something in the room beginning with a letter and raise their hand when they have an answer.

Waiting

At school, teachers may have large classes or be busy meaning your child will sometimes have to wait for the teacher's full attention. You could practice waiting by asking them to wait until you have finished a task.

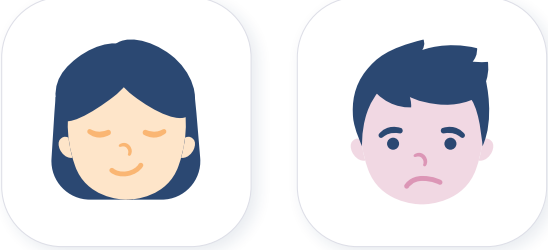
It may be possible for you to try waiting and/or raising your hand with your child and their friends on video platforms as some (such as Microsoft Teams) have a raise hand option.

Lining up

At school, lining up occurs daily. If you have more than one child at home, you could practice lining up for some activities i.e. washing hands.

Switching tasks

Sometimes in the class environment tasks switch quickly. At home, you may have allowed your child to finish one task before starting another. Re-introduce switching tasks quickly by bringing in timers or countdowns, and letting your child know it's ok not to finish a task and they can finish at another time.



Part 3:

Going back to school

Winding down time

Being at school may be overwhelming for your child. They might need some time to wind down after school. It can be helpful to plan for this by thinking of activities your child enjoys and what helps them relax.

Sensory Items

Sensory items are good way to create a relaxing, calm environment for your child.

Visual		bubble tubes cloud gazing
Auditory		music, nature sounds (e.g. bird chirping)
Taste		spicy foods strong foods (e.g. mustard)
Tactile/touch		soft blanket or cuddly toy smooth or rough stones
Smell		nature smells (e.g. wood) scented lotions / soap / bubble bath
Interoception (internal senses)		hot or cold drinks deep breathing
Vestibular (balance and movement)		dancing jumping
Proprioceptions (body positions)		walking stretching

If your child usually has an after school activity (e.g. football training or gymnastics) which they might not be able to do, it may be helpful to plan a similar activity on this day at home (e.g. playing with a football or doing cart wheels outside).

Feeling anxious about going back to school

Even after preparing for the transition back to school, your child may still feel anxious about this transition. **This feeling is normal.** Your child will have had to adapt to the changes brought about by COVID-19, and now they are facing another big change.

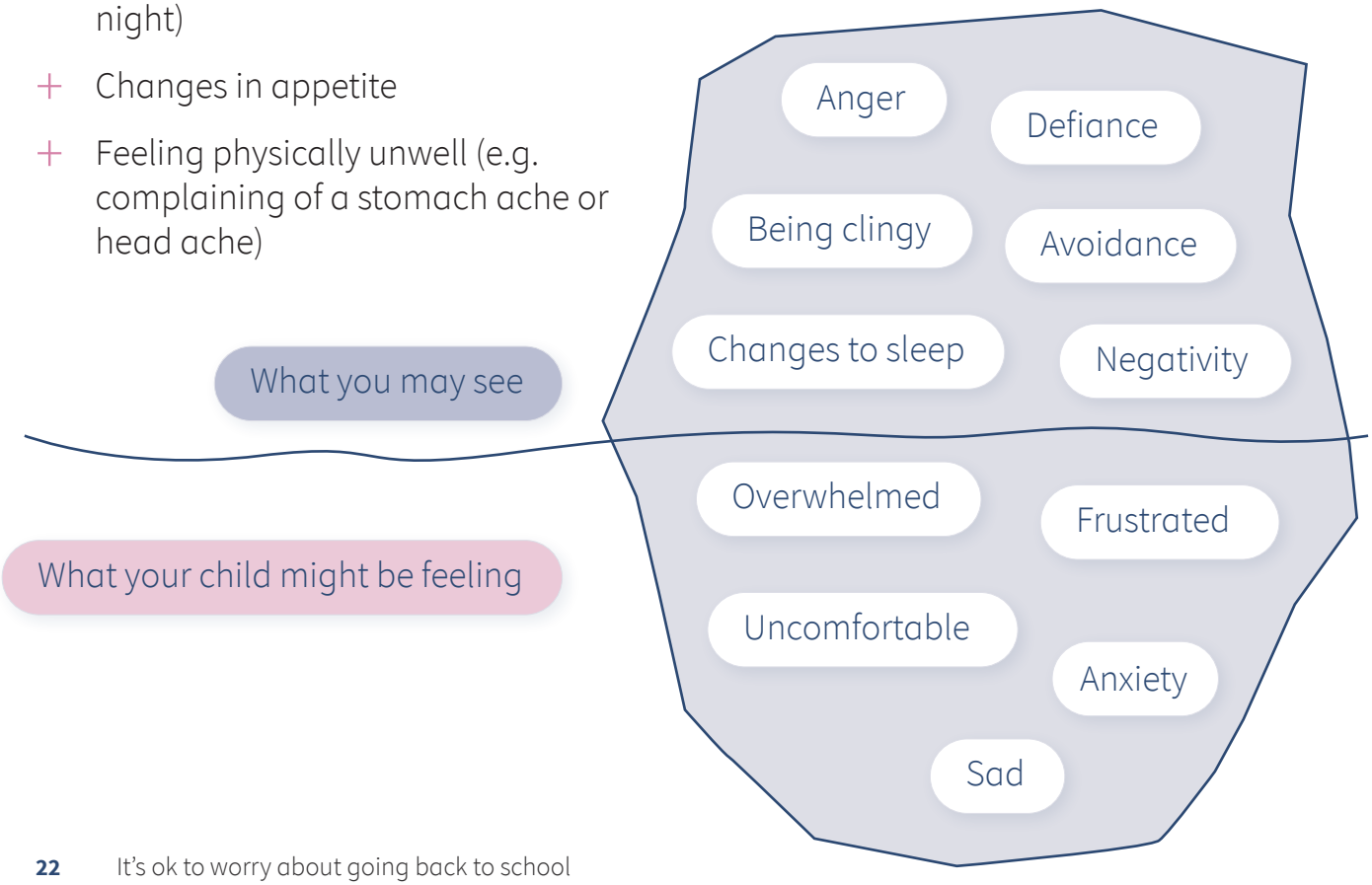
Anxiety can also present in different ways, such as:

+ Sadness, irritability or anger
+ Behavioural changes (e.g. requiring more attention or reassurance from parents, avoiding doing certain things)
+ Changes in sleep (e.g. difficulties with falling asleep, waking up during the night)
+ Changes in appetite
+ Feeling physically unwell (e.g. complaining of a stomach ache or head ache)

The different presentations of anxiety you see may depend on the time of day.

For example your child may:

+ Have difficulty falling asleep the night before going back to school
+ Try to delay getting ready for school in the morning
+ Feel sick the morning of school



Helping your child manage anxiety around going back to school

You could help your child manage feelings of anxiety by helping them identify their worries and talking about them in a calm way.

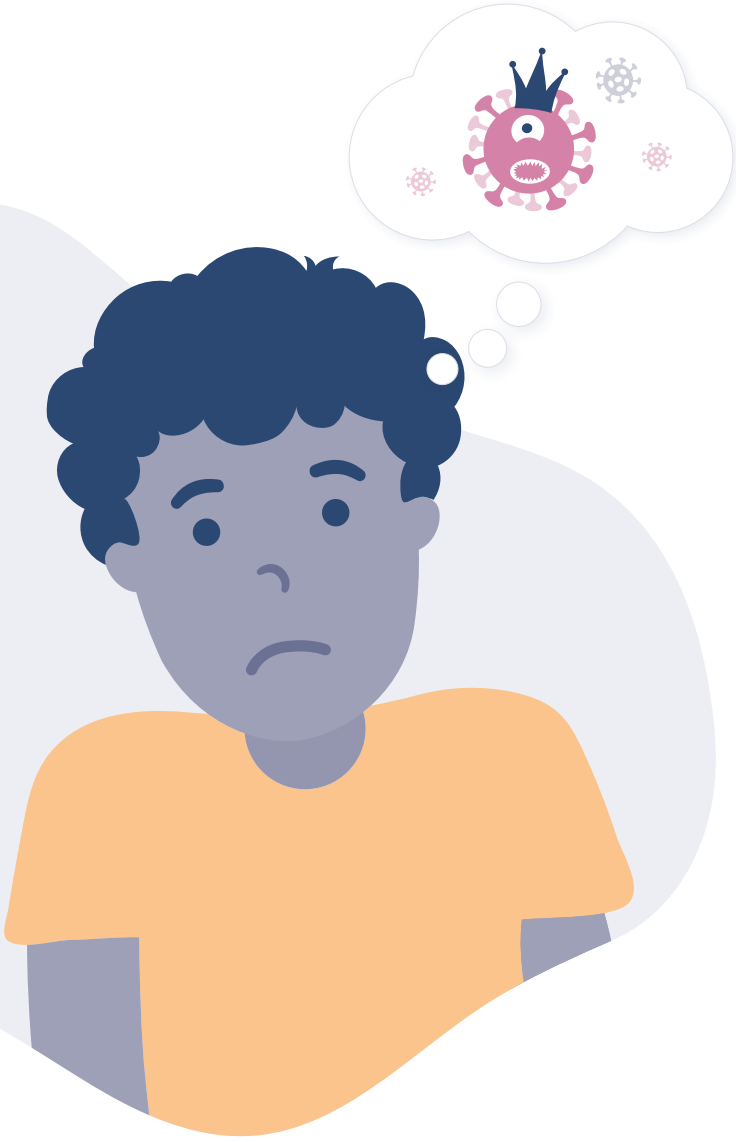
If your child finds it difficult to express how they feel, it may help to get your child to draw their worries or use the emotion chart provided on page 24.

Some other ways to help your child manage anxiety are:

+ Do something your child enjoys
+ Do some exercise
+ Do a relaxation exercise
+ Do a deep breathing exercise
+ Using sensory items (see page 21)

See our packs in the series "It's ok to worry about Coronavirus" for examples of ways to help your child manage worry. (See Additional Resources on page 27)

If you notice changes in your child's sleeping pattern, you may find sleep hygiene tips helpful. See our packs in the series "It's ok to worry about Coronavirus" for sleep hygiene tips. (See Additional Resources on page 21)



Emotion chart

How are YOU feeling about going back to school?



Calm



Sad



Worried



Angry



Happy



Confused



Not sure

Part 4:

Additional resources

Additional resources

COVID-19 advice

For the most up-to-date advice from the Scottish Government about COVID-19	https://www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/
Scottish Government advice on going back to school	https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-re-opening-schools-guide/
Local authorities	https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/schools-covid-19/ https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/coronavirus-covid-19 http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_132517.html

Education advice

Education rights	https://www.autism.org.uk/services/helplines/education-rights.aspx
Enquire	https://enquire.org.uk/

General

NHS Grampian CAMHS resources & podcast	www.camhsgrampian.org
NHS Grampian CAMHS resource packs "It's ok to worry about coronavirus"	https://www.camhsgrampian.org/covid
Parent Club	https://www.parentclub.scot/topics/coronavirus
CAMHS resources	https://www.camhs-resources.co.uk/

Supporting going back to school

'Back to school' Social Story by Elsa support	https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/back-to-school-after-coronavirus-story/
Social Stories by Autism little learners	https://www.autismlittlelearners.com/search/label/COVID-19
Song about physical distancing	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZvtoVrykb8
What is a school 'bubble'?	https://www.reachoutasc.com/attachments/article/13/School%20Bubble%20SS%20.pdf
'While we can't hug' story	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2PnnFrPaRgY
Song about other ways to hug	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OMg6t-z8KEI
Third space	https://www.thirdspace.scot/nait/covid-19-return-to-school/
Third space 'Ok not ok' resource	https://www.thirdspace.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Return-to-School-OK-not-OK-Guidance-and-Visuals.pdf
Worksheets	https://www.reachoutasc.com/resources/transition-to-new-class



If you feel you or your child's worries are getting bigger, you can contact:

Samaritans: 116 123
www.samaritans.org

Breathing Space: 0800 83 85 87
https://breathingspace.scot

NHS 24: 111
https://www.nhs24.scot

Your local GP

This resource may be made available, in full or summary form, in alternative formats and community languages. Please contact us on **0131 656 3200** or email **altformats@nes.scot.nhs.uk** to discuss how we can best meet your requirements.

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