



TIPS

for Parents on Helping Students Return to School During COVID-19



This document is one of several developed to provide resources for schools, parents and students as they return to school during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The document provides some general tips for families that have elected to have their students return, and other associated adult caregivers, teachers, and staff. This is by no means an exhaustive list but rather a “starting point” designed to address several of the key factors that can impact how students respond to the challenges that will inevitably accompany their return. At the end of this document a link is provided to a list of resources that includes recommendations and tools from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the CDC, the United States Department of Education, and the National Association of School Psychologist, among others.

1. Make Time to Talk



One of the most paralyzing factors of the pandemic is the lack of a “light at the end of the tunnel” and the powerlessness that accompanies the knowledge that we don’t really know what comes next. Including students in decision making and discussions about the return to school can provide them with a much-needed sense of control. Talking through how things may change at school for younger students will help them re-frame what lies ahead. Practicing procedures such as wearing a mask and social distancing can reduce anxiety for younger students. Communicating your expectations for compliance at school for your teenagers is also critical so that there is no question regarding what you expect. Give kids control when you can. Let them choose their masks, plan how they want to handle lunch, etc. Role play with younger students how to communicate to friends who may getting too close or how to respond to someone who says “masks are stupid.” This can help them be prepared when these situations arise. Similar “walkthroughs” with teenagers can help them to have a plan for peers who challenge them when they are trying to be compliant but are receiving peer pressure to do otherwise. This age group is easily influenced by peers and tends to have the perception that “bad things only happen to other people.” Helping all students recognize that the protocols are in place to keep them safe but to also keep others safe such as compromised grandparents can help them to stay focused during the challenges that lie ahead.

2. Modeling is the most powerful tool adults have in impacting how students respond to returning to school.



Wear a mask. Make sure you are social-distancing when you are in the store, at the park, etc. Consider what you discuss regarding your own feelings/concerns about the return to school and when and where you have those discussions (think before venting on Facebook). The choice of words that you use in discussions with friends and family sets the tone for how your student may respond when faced with difficulty. Don’t avoid difficult conversations but make sure you tailor them to the age of the student and take the opportunity to demonstrate how to have difficult conversations with integrity and respect.

3. Make a Plan



Working out a school plan with your student can be a great way to help anticipate where difficulties may arise. Do you need to change your morning routine or end of day routine? How will your child arrive at school and when? What will the plan for lunch be? While these types of things may simply have played out in the first days of school in the past, the current landscape may require you to rethink how these things used to occur. Familiarize yourself with what your school district has in place and what their expectations are for arrival, dismissal, lunch etc. All districts have their Health and Safety Plans posted on their websites and most are communicating through email and bulletins. If something is unclear, contact the school to get clarification. Most districts are asking that parents screen students in the morning before sending them to school. What is that

going to look like in your house and do you need to get up fifteen minutes earlier to make sure that happens? Do you have the tools you need (a thermometer for instance)? Make several “dry runs” prior to the first day of school to make sure your time schedule is going to actually work and that your child will be where they need to be when they need to be there. Make time to debrief kids when they return from school. Discuss how things went and any hurdles they encountered. Use that information to edit your “school plan” accordingly.

4. Be a Team Player



School employees and parents must agree to come together to meet these challenging times. Give each other the benefit of the doubt when possible. No one knows exactly how all of this will play out but everyone wants what they believe is best for their student. Recognize that these are uncharted waters for EVERYONE. Communication is critical as difficulties arise and approach those challenges as you would if you were all on the field in the biggest game of the year. Be kind to yourself and, together, look for solutions that keep our families, school staff and most importantly, our students safe.

[Click here](#) for the articles, references, and additional resources used to create this document, or visit the SEW CoP homepage for a complete list of resources and services: <https://www.csiu.org/SEWCOP>.

This resource list has been vetted and compiled by Alice Justice in conjunction with the Social Emotional Wellness Community of Practice. Alice Justice is a veteran educator who has served in a variety of roles including Biology Teacher, School Psychologist, Home and School Visitor and School Counselor. Retired from public education, she has served as a consultant to the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit, Pennsylvania Department of Education, and Pennsylvania College of Technology on topics including workforce development, career and technical education, school counseling plans, crisis response and management, and mental health services.

The Social Emotional Wellness Community of Practice (SEW CoP) is a regional group of experts from education, healthcare, social services, United Ways, special education, early childhood, behavior health, the Center for the Promotion of Social and Emotional Learning (CPSEL), and the McDowell Institute of Bloomsburg University. The purpose of the SEW CoP is to support area school districts with resources, supports, trainings, and recommendations related to crisis prevention and response, suicide prevention and postvention, positive behavioral interventions and supports, trauma education, etc. and to offer system-wide support of districts’ initiatives related to SEW and mental and behavioral health.