



St Michael's Collegiate

Supporting our students to return to school in 2022

It seems that COVID-19 is the gift that keeps on giving and while we in Tasmania have been less impacted than those in other parts of the world, it continues to be a challenging time for many. With students expected to return to school next week we can find ourselves asking many questions:

“Is it safe to return?” “What will the classroom look like?” “Will my friends still like me?” “What will be different about school?” “What if there is another outbreak of the virus?”

While governments and schools are preparing to make the return to school as safe as possible for their communities, the reality is that some of the answers to these questions remain unknown and with unknowns or uncertainty often comes an increased feeling of anxiety. Simply put anxiety often arises from overestimating the size of a challenge or risk and underestimating our ability to handle it. On the other hand, thinking about our strengths and coping skills, as well as taking the time to develop a plan for how we might handle future difficulties can act to alleviate or manage some of these feelings.

What can be done to reduce feelings of anxiety and start preparing students to return to school?

For parents:

1. Today, more than ever we are being bombarded by information, media and input. Adults need to **monitor and limit information** for their children, which means being mindful of what you are sharing with them and refraining from constantly having the news playing.
2. **Start with looking after yourself.** Before you can help your child or teenager with their feelings, make sure that you are okay and that you are calm enough to validate, reassure, and support them.
 - Talk to others, practice self-care and using your calming strategies.
3. Start **discussing the return to school.** Including:
 - Reassuring your young person that it is safe to return to school
 - Discussing the known changes to routines and environments such as; reduction in group activities, having your temperature checked and staff and students wearing masks.
 - Trying to answer any questions that your young person might have. If you don't know the answer, encourage them to get in touch with their Mentor or Year Level Coordinator.
4. Try to **validate and acknowledge any feelings** that your young person may express regarding their return to school. If specific worries are identified, consider how you or your child might handle these. This activity can be done by completing two columns. One titled: 'What might be difficult for me?' And the other: 'How will I handle this?'
5. **Re-establish normal routines** in the lead up to school.
 - The week before: Return to normal usual wake up and bedtime routines, as well as having meals at a similar time to the school day.
 - The day before: support your young person to pack their bag and prepare their uniform
 - The morning of: try to remain calm and allow more time than usual to get ready



For students:

1. If you haven't already, instil a **regular routine**. Including: sleep (consistent bed / wake time), eating at appropriate mealtimes, showering and getting dressed for the day and going outside and doing some form of physical activity each day.
2. **Locate all the items** that you will need to return to school, including your uniform, computer and lunchbox.
3. **Maintain perspective and a positive state of mind.**
 - Instead of telling yourself 'I will get sick at school', remind yourself 'we are all working to keep people safe and well'.
 - Think about the things you can and can't control and try not to worry about the things outside of your control. Examples of things you can control are: telling your teacher that you don't understand the work, checking in with your friends and what you will eat for lunch. Whereas you can't control that your teacher is away or that the borders are open.
4. **Be kind to yourself and others**
 - Notice how you speak to yourself. Would you speak to a friend like that? Try to be kind and give yourself a break. We are all adjusting and learning to this new way of being.
 - Remember to be thoughtful about what you share and say on social media.
 - Use this as an opportunity to spread kindness. Not only will this bring a smile to the other person, but research shows doing acts of kindness also improve your mood.
5. **Seek more support**
 - Remember that you are not alone. Every single person has been impacted by COVID-19 in some way and it's ok if you are struggling. Try to find someone you trust and share your concerns or feelings with them.
 - If you need more support don't be afraid, ask and contact a professional.
 - o [Beyond Blue](#), [Headspace Australia](#) and [Lifeline](#) have resources on their websites. They also have phone hotlines and web chats where you can reach out.
 - o Talk to your Mentor or Year Level Coordinator at school.

What will the School be doing to support returning students?

- School provides predictable daily routines and boundaries, which are all important factors for preventing and managing mental health challenges. When students return to school, we will be working to keep these routines and expectations as consistent as possible. Therefore, providing a sense of comfort to students and removing the need for young people and their families to impose their own routines.
- Another strategy that is known to reduce feelings of anxiety and one that has and will continue to be a focus at Collegiate, is providing clear communication. As a School community we have tried to provide regular updates and information about COVID-19 and what this means for our students and their families. This will continue to occur moving forwards and we ask that you too focus on communication. Please contact your / your young person's Mentor or Year Level Coordinator with any concerns about returning to school.
- Our teaching staff are planning for students to return and are committed to supporting their ongoing learning and academic needs.
- In addition to this, we will focus on student wellbeing, by continuing to look out for one another and having conversations about how we are finding the return. Our Student Management and Wellbeing Teams will also be available to provide more targeted support as needed.



A Final Thought:

It is also important to take the time to reflect on the global pandemic experience (so far) and consider all the good that has come out of these uncertain times. I for one, have appreciated slowing down, playing board games with my family, the times I have been able to connect with loved ones from other places and making time to be in nature. I am pleased that society has been forced to use technology to become more efficient. I have loved seeing the acts of kindness occurring within my immediate network and wider community and I am proud of the way our students have developed independence and confidence as they have had to be adaptable and take more ownership of their learning.

I encourage you all to take some time to reflect on this experience, (the good and the bad). By asking yourself: *“What have you been grateful for?” “What have you learnt?” “What have you enjoyed?” “What have you found to be the most challenging?” “What are you most looking forward to in the future?” “What will you be more mindful of continuing in the future?”*

Here at Collegiate, we are excited to welcome back our students and feel blessed to be able to continue to support them in all the ways that we love. As with this entire COVID-19 journey, we are creating a new normal and we encourage you to join us on this journey – day by day.

Nicole Young
School Psychologist