

## INSIGHTS

### Managing school stress during the pandemic



The pandemic continues to bring challenges to families in another year where learning may take place in person, online or somewhere in between. The Scouting motto “Be prepared” with the addition of “for anything” comes to mind as we approach another school year of uncertainty.

Here’s what you can do to take the stress out school this year.

#### If your child attends class in-person

##### Ask about their concerns

Avoid generalised assumptions about COVID. Your child may not be bothered by the virus, but they may be worried about wearing a mask to school or making friends if they’ve spent time in remote learning. Drill down to their specific worries about going to school and allay their fears by helping them come up with simple solutions to address their concerns.

##### Allay your own fears

It’s natural to be concerned about your child’s health so get the facts about social distancing, sanitising and other COVID-safe measures teachers are taking at school. Having accurate information will allay your own fears and minimise the chances of your child being unduly anxious about going to school.

##### Put your own germ-avoidance measures in place

Initiate habits to reduce the risk of your child bringing COVID home to your family. Changing out of clothes, showering as soon as they get home, washing hands regularly and social distancing from older relatives are the types of measures that help reduce the spread of coronavirus. Keep up to date with the latest health advice and involve everyone in creating a COVID-safe family plan.

#### If your child learns remotely

##### Create a personal learning space

Anchor your child’s learning to a familiar place at home. Your child may need a private space away from others for them to focus on specific tasks. If you don’t have a separate nook or cranny, consider hanging an old sheet from the ceiling or using a temporary divider to provide privacy. Be mindful that there will be times when your child or young person wants to work in the company of others so be prepared for them to set up a work station near in a public place.

## Get them moving about

Kids are used to moving around during the school day so encourage them to spend learning time in different places. Perhaps they can spend some time in a bean bag reading a book, use an ironing board as a stand-up desk or prop up on their elbows in the hallway to complete a set task. Get them outdoors as well. Neuroscience informs us that outdoor activities supports kids' mental and physical health and promotes learning.

## Allow screen time with friends

Social isolation is a recognised problem for both primary and secondary school students during remote learning so give your child ample time for digital catch ups with friends. Socialising may mean playing online games, using Snapchat and other age-appropriate social media platforms.

## If your child does a hybrid model with some days in person and other days remote

### Make it clear what's expected each day

Have two charts – one with the in-person schedule and one with the remote schedule, where your child can see it clearly. Each night go over the required schedule with them for the following day. Encourage older students to create two schedules in their personal calendars or timetables to help them stay on track.

### Ensure remote learning days mirror in person days

Routines help kids feel safe and be ready for learning. On remote learning days your child should wake up at the same time as they do when they attend school, have breakfast and get dressed at the same time ready to settle into work.

### Reassure your child that this arrangement is temporary

Kids don't always have the same perspective as adults and may think the current measures will always be this way. Reassure them that they will go back to school, see their friends and enjoy activities as they did before the pandemic.

### Stay flexible

A hybrid learning model may not suit every child so be prepared to consult with your child's teachers if this system causes too much stress. It may be best if your child switches to a fully at-home learning model so work with teachers for a suitable solution.

## For parents

### Take a break yourself

Kids take their emotional cues from their parents so model self-care for your child. If you are a tightly wound ball yourself, they'll more likely become anxious and worried themselves. Regardless of the situation, take a break each day. Go for a walk, read a book, do something that helps you to unwind, or engage in activity that you enjoyed as a child.



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Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's an award-winning speaker and the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation*, and the bestselling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. Michael is a former teacher with 15 years experience, and has 30 years experience in parenting education. He also holds a Master of Educational Studies from Monash University specialising in parenting education.