



Back to school – anxiety around the new school term or year

The new school year can be a source of fear and anxiety for children, particularly when starting at a new school. Tears, sleepless nights and outbursts are all indicators of anxiety.

There will be a whole range of questions running through children's heads before starting school:

- + Will my homework get harder or more frequent?
- + Will I have friends in my class?
- + Will my new classmates be nice?
- + Will my new teacher be nice?
- + Who will I sit with and will I fit in?
- + Do I know where to go?

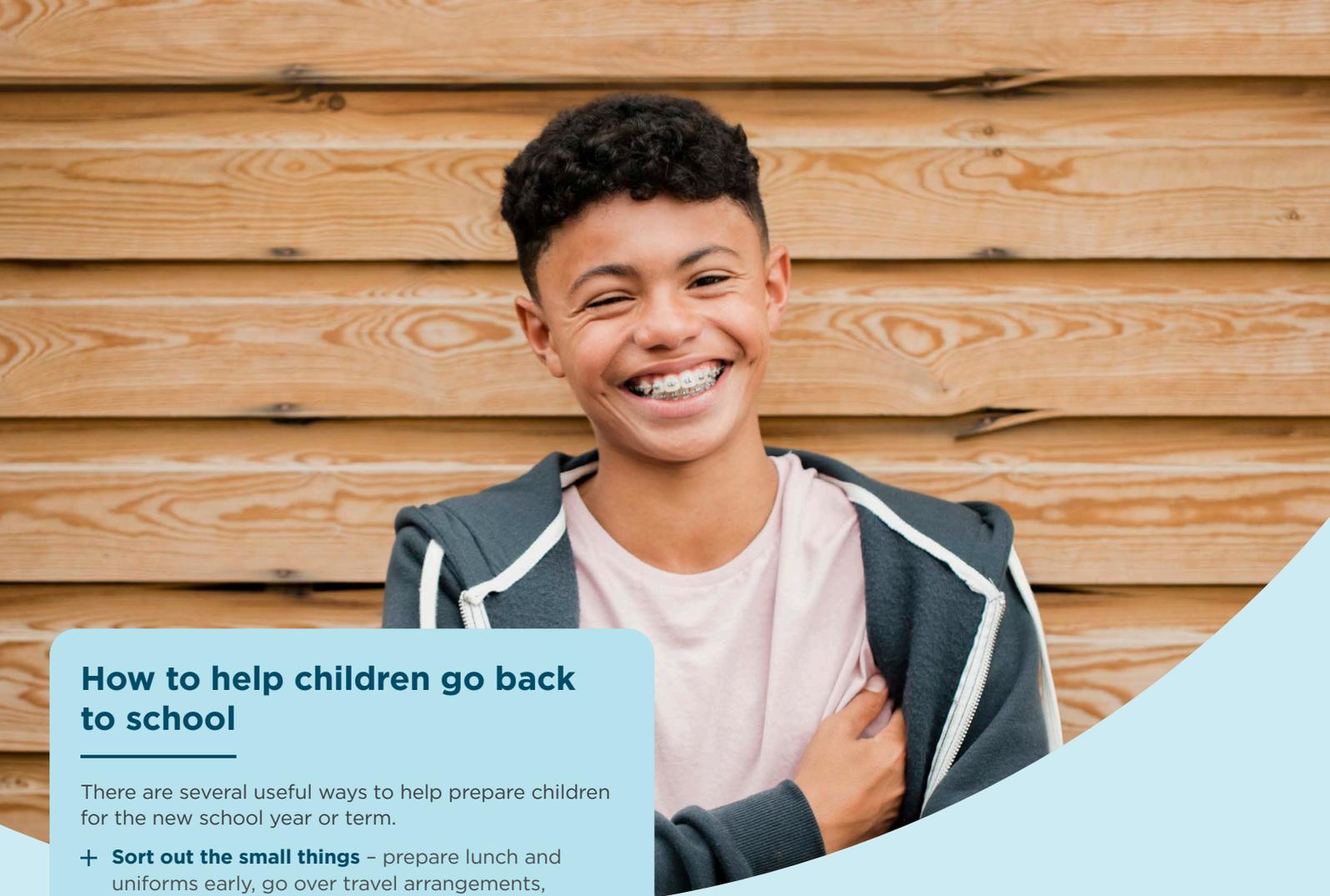
The element of the unknown can be nerve-wracking, but there are ways to help prepare for school.



Anticipatory anxiety

While starting school can feel distressing, the worry about going is often worse than the event itself. This type of anxiety is called anticipatory anxiety. It is similar to being scared of spiders. If you never go near a spider, you never get to challenge your fears, so these fears will grow.

Skipping days at school loses valuable opportunities to develop and make new friends. This can also cause children to fall behind in classes, creating further worry and the desire to avoid school.



How to help children go back to school

There are several useful ways to help prepare children for the new school year or term.

- + **Sort out the small things** – prepare lunch and uniforms early, go over travel arrangements, organise school supplies, and any other details. Perhaps do a practice run of the journey too
- + **Get ahead with a positive sleep routine** – start with fixed bedtimes, and getting up in the morning, a week early. Disturbed sleep contributes greatly to stress and anxiety
- + **Talk to them** – discuss any fears in a comfortable setting. Find ways to problem-solve and use evidence to challenge these fears
- + **Be positive** – try to focus on the positive aspects, such as things to look forward to at school
- + **Don't let fears and anxieties show** – it can be scary for parents too when children go back to school after a long summer, handing over care-giving responsibilities to the teachers, etc. However, showing worry can make children's nerves worse. Be optimistic but firm, and avoid rewarding poor behaviour and tantrums
- + **Talk to teachers** – you can alert teachers to anything specific that is causing your child to worry, such as speaking in front of the class. Teachers will be happy to listen and help
- + **Visit the school** – if possible, do this before the start of term to get familiar and ask the teachers any questions
- + **Arrange a playdate** – do this before the start of term to build excitement for seeing friends
- + **Go in with a friend** – walking into school with friends can be highly reassuring



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