



## PREPARING YOUR CHILD TO RETURN TO SCHOOL SOME HELPFUL TIPS

### **Prepare your child**

Preparing is about having *a conversation* before school starts. Approximately 2 weeks before the first day, set aside uninterrupted time to talk with your child (some children do best opening up when engaged in other activities like a drive or on a walk.) Use open-ended questions (*How are you feeling about going back? What are you looking forward to the most? What are you worried about? Tell me what you've been thinking about your return.*) Avoid questions that allow for a “yes” or “no” response such as “Are you anxious about going back?” Open-ended questions allow for a richer dialogue.

After you've posed a question, make sure to wait for your child to formulate their thoughts. Be patient and actively listen. *Active listening* involves truly focusing on what the other person is saying and being able to get a sense of their experience. You help your child know that you've really heard what they have to say by reflecting it back to them. You can do this by *briefly summarizing what you heard* and then saying “did I get that right?” Or, “is that what you meant?” This conversation, or aspects of it, can be repeated. Your child might do just fine the first week but struggle the second. Continue to check in with them. Be gentle with them and with yourself.

If your child is expressing grave worries or concerns, ask them if they'd like your help. Some children want concrete help, others just want a safe space to express their thoughts and feelings and are not ready to move into taking action. If they are not quite ready to take active steps, remind them that you will be there if or when they are.

If they do want your assistance, reassure them that you will *help them come up with a plan*. Communicate to your child that you can work together to develop this plan, because when the child is included, they are more likely to be invested and follow through. This plan can involve setting up a routine at least one week prior to school starting. *As much as possible, your child's sleep schedule should start to shift so that they are gradually preparing for an earlier wake-up and earlier bedtime.* If they typically pack a lunch or get ready for school with a shower in the evening, they should resume these activities. If it's helpful to select clothing and gather needed materials in the evening, they can start to do this, as well.

*If your child has not been to their high school campus, it is a good idea to plan to drive there and walk around as much as possible, so that they become accustomed to their new school home.* Talk with them during and after this process, asking them how this was for them. If your child is particularly anxious, you may have to do this a few times, increasing the time of each visit to help them build tolerance, and to de-sensitize them to the environment.