Strategies to Help with Going Back to School:

- ## For You as Parents

The return to school can be a stressful time for the whole family. This year, in particular, the return to school routine and the uncertainty about what those routines will be, may mean increased stress and challenges for parents and care givers.

As well as preparing and supporting your child, it is just as important for you to recognize and manage your own stress during this transition.

Stress is a normal response to events that upset people's balance in some way or make them feel unsafe. However, if stress is not managed it can adversely affect people's health, mood and how they function.

Take time to think about your own triggers, outlets and resources and plan for how you will look after yourself if things get overwhelming. Your Enable Ireland social worker is also available to support you.

Useful Websites:

- Parentline
- Special Needs Parents Association
- Managing Stress and Self-care for Parents and Care-givers
- Webinar - Returning to School after Covid for children with SEN
- Dept. Of Children and Youth Affairs Information for Returning to School

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Strategies to Help with Going Back to School:

- **For Your Child-how to help manage their anxiety and their fears**

1. **Normalise:** Let your child know it is understandable to feel worried in times of uncertainty.

2. **Empathise:** Explore the anxious thoughts your child is having & acknowledge how upset these thoughts must be making them feel.

3. **Inform:** Share information from reliable sources in an age appropriate manner. Sensitively correct any misconceptions your child has. Social stories can be a helpful, child-friendly way of sharing this information.

4. **Define:** Help your child by exploring the differences between hypothetical 'what if' worries and practical worries that can be problem solved.

5. **Problem Solve:** Help your child to step by step problem solve practical worries. If your child is worried about getting the virus, make a list of the various actions that are being taken to prevent this. Focus on the 'controllables' (e.g. face mask, hand washing etc).

6. **Postpone:** Help your child let go of hypothetical 'what if' worries by moving their attention onto something they enjoy. Discuss postponing 'what if' worries about the future and dealing with worries based on the information we have now. If your child is worried about school being closed again this academic year, encourage them to postpone this worry until more information is available. When they know the facts, they can return to the worry and problem solve it.
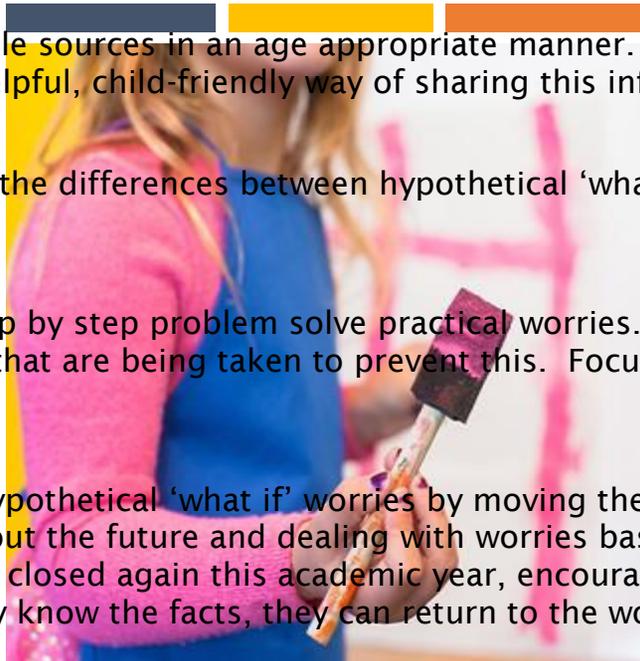
7. Triggers: Pay attention to what keeps your child focused on their worries and try to reduce this. This might mean limiting how often you watch news updates or reducing how much time you spend discussing the Coronavirus.

8. Responsibility: Let your child know that the government and scientists are working very hard together to find solutions to our current difficulties. Help your child let go of any worries that aren't their responsibility to sort out.

9. Positives: Help your child focus on and enjoy their favourite activities and also help them focus on the positive things that enjoy about school and can return to again.

10. Routine: In times of uncertainty creating a sense of normality through structure and predictability can have a hugely positive impact on a child's anxiety levels (consider sleep, mealtime, physical activity, preferred activities, time with family, TV time).

11. Exposure: If your child is particularly afraid of wearing mask (if required) or of others wearing masks, you could practice trying on different masks at home. Perhaps check if their school will provide a photo of their teacher with the mask or shield in place before they start school.

12. Liaise with school: many schools already have various strategies or plans in place to help children adjust to the new adjusted school life. Perhaps check-in and see what measures your school may have in place.
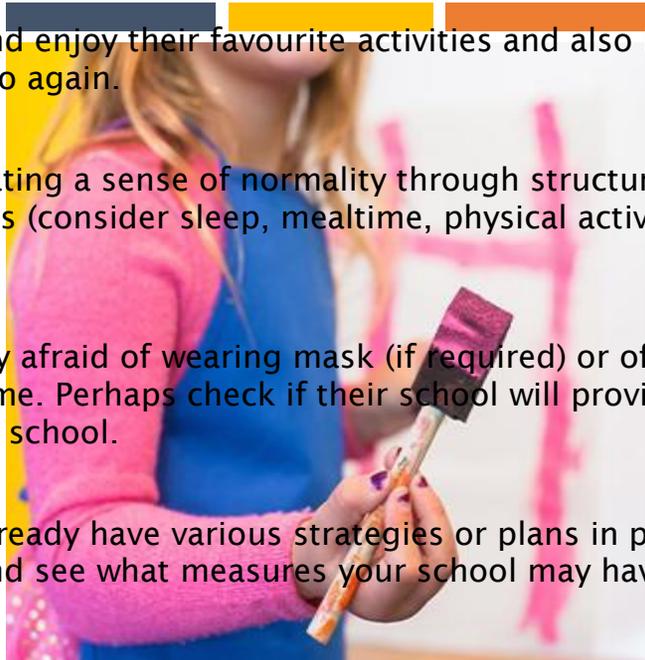
General Problem-Solving Tips

Identify the Problem -What is the problem? It is important that everyone defines the problem in the same way and there is agreement about what a successful outcome might look like. E.g.: It is always stressful leaving the house on school mornings because my child is so disorganised and takes a long time to get organised.

· **D**efine Your Goals

What do you want to happen? E.g.: My child will be able to get ready for school independently with a minimum of arguments/reminders.

Explore Possible Solutions -What are some solutions? Which is the best solution? Is it safe? Is it fair? Will it work? E.G: Our child will lay out his clothes the night before/ Our child will organise their school bag after homework every day etc.

Action -Choose and Use a Solution E.g. a possible solution might include sitting as a family and developing a visual schedule for your morning routine. Each member of the family can add in the things that are important to them. The children can even draw their own schedules or take photos of themselves completing certain tasks.
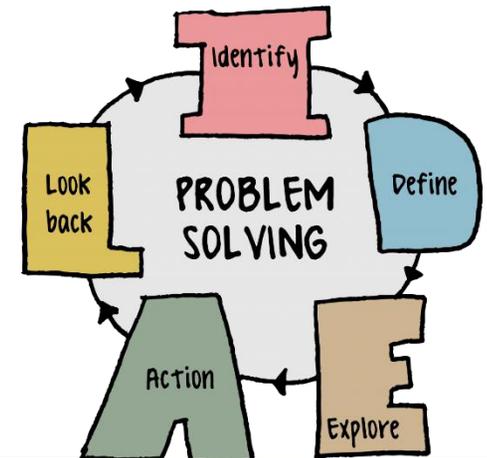
Learn from your actions -Is your plan working? (If not, then go through the process again)

What will you do the next time the situation occurs? It may be that your initial goal contained too many steps, or you set the bar too high or the plan was implemented differently by you and your partner, etc. Some of the things your plan might include:Goals, agreed solutions, agreed rewards and supports, a timeline, allocated responsibilities and an agreed timeframe for review.

This **Info guide** contains:

A Questions and Answers session on returning to the classroom aimed at parents of infants and Special Education Needs Teaching, by Mash.ie

A simplified summary of the complex roadmap to reopening schools document, and info on "pods" in the classroom, also by Mash Ireland.

A Widget toolkit to support parents of children returning to school.

A free trial of TextHelp, a great tool to boost accessibility & literacy of websites for people who might have dyslexia or mild vision impairments.
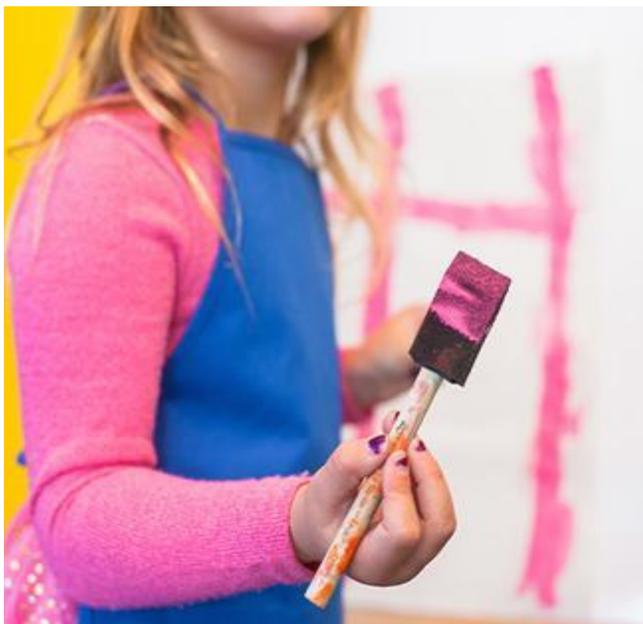
To see these resources and lots more info for parents and caregivers, visit our dedicated webpage here (scroll down to the end for the Assistive Technology Related Resources): https://www.enableireland.ie/resources4parents

Also, our colleagues in the Assistive Technology (AT) department of Enable Ireland have compiled an **Info guide** for parents with information on free webinars, back-to-school resources and other useful content.

Assistive Technology

Mash.ie

texthelp

Widgit