

## **Children, Mental Health, and Transitioning Back to School**

This letter provides information for parents and teachers to use when talking to kids about starting school. I have given examples of what to say and used language that is meant for younger children. The language can be changed for older children and teens. Feel free to put any of it in your own words or read right off the page.

### **1.Explain to the students that school will look differently than what they're used to.**

“School has some of the same rules and some different rules that we must follow to stay “safe”. Remember that safe means that our hearts and our bodies feel ok! Your job as students is to follow the rules and be a learner in the classroom. And to have fun! It is not your job to worry. Let the teachers, principals, and parents do the worrying. Teachers will explain the rules to students on the first day back”

### **2. Explain to the students that the school's guidelines might change throughout the year.**

“School might look even more different tomorrow. We have different ways of going to school and the administration will let us know how and when it changes. Even if school is different tomorrow your job is still the same. Follow the rules and directions given to you by your teacher and be a learner in the classroom.”

### **3. Talk to the students about their feelings on returning to school.**

“It's ok to be nervous! New things can be exciting and also make us feel nervous. A lot of what we're doing hasn't been done in 100 years!! Say positive things to yourself and to your classmates. They might be feeling nervous too. Remember that your feelings are ok. Whether you are scared, excited, happy, bored, or angry, it is ok. When you have uncomfortable feelings what do you do to help yourself feel better? Remember what your teacher taught you when they came into your classroom “Stop, name your feeling, calm down” Take those deep breaths! You can say good things to yourself. Ask a friend to tell you a joke! Watch something funny on your ipad (not at school! Haha!) Play some basketball or run around outside the house. When you are at school or home you can talk to your teacher or your mom or dad. It's important to let your teachers or your mom and dad know when you have feelings that are bothering you. And it's great to let them know too when you have feelings that make you feel good inside! All of us will have lots of different feelings every day. What are some of your feelings today?”

#### **4. Questions they may ask or be wondering about.**

“What if I get sick with Covid?” Try not to worry about it unless it happens. Stay focused on your job which is to follow the rules and be a learner. If you do get sick, there will be new rules and directions to follow to help keep you safe. Your doctor will help you. Remember to say positive words to yourself.

“What if my friend gets sick?” Try not to worry about it unless it happens. If it does happen, it will be important to be a good friend. They might be feeling scared and their bodies might not feel good. You could join them on google hangouts, send them a card, or color them a picture.

“What if I have to quarantine at home?” Remember that your number one most important job is to be a student. That means to follow the rules and directions given to you and to be a learner. During quarantine you won’t be in the classroom but your teacher will let you know what to do.

5. A car runs best when it’s tires are aired, its oil is changed, and its gas tank is full. That’s just like people! We learn better and feel better, or “run better” when we’ve had a good meal, drink lots of fluids, and get our sleep. It’s important that we give ourselves the best chance of “running” every day.

6. Don’t forget to set your goals! Have something that you are working on and looking forward to. Set a goal that challenges you and excites you at the same time. Ask your teacher and your mom or dad what a good goal would be.

7. Make a list of all the positive things in your life. Pets, friends, family you have and love. Maybe some neat things you have at home. Special memories and special occasions you are looking forward to.

#### **Worried your child may be depressed?**

When depressed, younger children are more likely to have physical symptoms, such as aches or pains, restlessness, distress during separation from parents, as they may not have the emotional attunement and/or expressive abilities to talk about their emotions. Older children need to watch for the following; Loss of interest in usual fun activities, withdrawal from social or usual pleasurable activities, difficulties concentrating, sleep increase (or decrease), appetite/weight changes, if they are more agitated or aggressive, comments indicating hopelessness or low self-worth. If you see the above changes, please make an appointment with your child’s physician.

### **On an ending note to parents and teachers...**

We really emphasize that “Your job is to be a student which means to follow the rules and directions and be a learner in the classroom”. This is for a couple of reasons. The first reason is to give some power and control back to the student. If they focus on things they can control, then they worry less about the things they can't. That goes for adults too. The second reason is it helps all of us to be able to move forward safely with caution rather than to freeze in fear. We have to keep moving forward.

Please contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

Wishing you all well,

Bob Waltman, Counselor  
Maggie Rasmussen, Counselor  
Cross County Community Schools