

BACK 2 BAC: Student welfare following a period of remote learning

One of the greatest concerns for parents and teachers is the social emotional wellbeing of children as they face the major readjustment to school after the recent period of isolation. It is possible that children will experience a wide range of emotions. The following advice from BAC experts provides helpful information and tips to make the transition as smooth as possible.

Your child may be feeling anxious

The two greatest anxiety-causing fears amongst school aged children right now is their academic and social situation. Some may be feeling that they have fallen way behind in their schoolwork, or that they are socially disconnected from their peer group and fear they may never fit back in.

Advice from the deputies

Teachers' expectations are realistic about this period of home learning. They are well aware that learning from home has suited some students more than others and that individuals have operated at varying degrees of productivity. Teachers have adjusted learning programs and assessments and will provide a supported transition back to school.

When students return on Monday, a large part of each teacher's focus will be on social emotional wellbeing and helping students get back into routine. Additionally, the BAC Wellbeing Team will be active in monitoring students, checking in with them and having friendly chats or offering a counselling appointment. Call 3347 6444 if you wish to arrange a time for your child.

Your child may be feeling fear

Some children will fear the loss of the strong family connections and pandemic traditions that you as a family have developed over the past five weeks. Young ones especially will be susceptible to this, worrying that spending time with mum and/or dad might stop.

College counsellor's advice

Hold on to some of your pandemic traditions. Play board games, have family mealtimes, go on family walks and bike rides after school and/or on the weekends. You may not be able to spend *as much* time but don't abandon the great habits you've developed in isolation.



Your child may feel depressed

For many children, depression and listlessness are associated with poor quality and quantity of sleep and/or excessive screen time. With isolation, many children have been staying up very late to play computer games or connect with friends and others on TikTok and Instagram, some without their parents' knowledge. Obsessive thoughts and behaviour around gaming has been shown to lead to anxiety, depression, social phobias, and poor academic performance. (Gaming addiction was classified as a mental health disorder by the World Health Organisation in 2018.)

College counsellor's advice

1. Make the transition to healthier sleeping habits, institute screen time limits and lock away games and phones so that children cannot access them when they are meant to be sleeping or doing schoolwork. Increasing sleep time may need to be approached in a gradual way. The Sleep Foundation recommends 9 to 11 hours for children aged 6 to 13 years of age and 8 to 10 hours for children aged 14-17 years (7-9 hours for 18-year-olds).
2. Interrupt obsessive thoughts with positive *social connections* and *behavioural interruptions* that bring children back to using their five senses and recognising their value as part of God's creation:
 - a. stretches
 - b. deep breathing
 - c. walk barefoot on the lawn in the sun
 - d. take a walk in nature
 - e. have a conversation with someone face to face instead of a screen-related interaction
 - f. read an inspiring story
 - g. be real with God about your feelings and take a moment to listen

If you feel your child needs more help than you can provide, please make an appointment to see your GP for further help.



How to ascertain your child's emotional state

Start a conversation with your child about how they are feeling:

1. Pick a quiet time when you know you won't be interrupted.
2. Ask open-ended questions that can't be answered with a simple Yes or No.
3. Give your child time to think and speak without pre-empting what they might be thinking.
4. Validate their feelings rather than dismissing or solving 'the problem' and let them know that it is normal for them to feel this way. Only make suggestions if they specifically ask you to help them and encourage them to think of solutions themselves.

Never underestimate the effect of validating and normalising feelings. "I'm sure this is what many of your friends are feeling, too" always helps them feel less isolated and alone.

*This is not a normal school year. Teachers understand this and realise that there will be a period of transition. If you have concerns, please inform your child's teacher.