

WONDERS & WORRIES

School Re-entry After A Parent's Recent Diagnosis



Wonders & Worries

Professional support for children through a parent's illness or injury.

We will, together.



Returning to school after a significant change in the family can fill children with many emotions. This may impact children in different ways at different times. Returning to school can feel comforting one day with many opportunities to focus on friends and schoolwork, while at other times, school may feel extremely stressful and challenging. The following information reviews tips to keep in mind while supporting the transition back to school for your child:

Connect with School Support Team:

Change can affect a child on many different levels: emotional, physical, cognitive, spiritual, and behavioral. School can heighten stress reactions, so it's helpful to plan the re-entry with your child.

Topics to consider when talking with your child's teacher(s):

EXPECTATIONS

Learn what the expectations are for each class and coordinate a plan for success by modifying the workload, as needed, while your child is processing this new information and adjusting back into a routine. Discuss what your child's specific needs may be.

STRESS AND EMOTIONS

To help manage stress and big feelings that may arise, having a fidget or comfort item available can be helpful.

ADDITIONAL BREAKS

During challenging times with treatment, hospitalizations (etc.), much energy is spent trying to maintain a sense of equilibrium and taking additional breaks and time to play can promote coping. Encourage your child and teacher to create a nonverbal signal to indicate that the student may need: help, reassurance, or a break from class (and plan where this break could be – school office, with the school nurse, etc.).

ABILITY TO FOCUS

Processing change can impact a child's ability to focus and complete tasks, so a child may need to spend extra time and energy on organizing and planning. Teachers may have ideas for time management and tracking assignments. For some children it may be beneficial to have a homework buddy.

HEIGHTENED FEARS

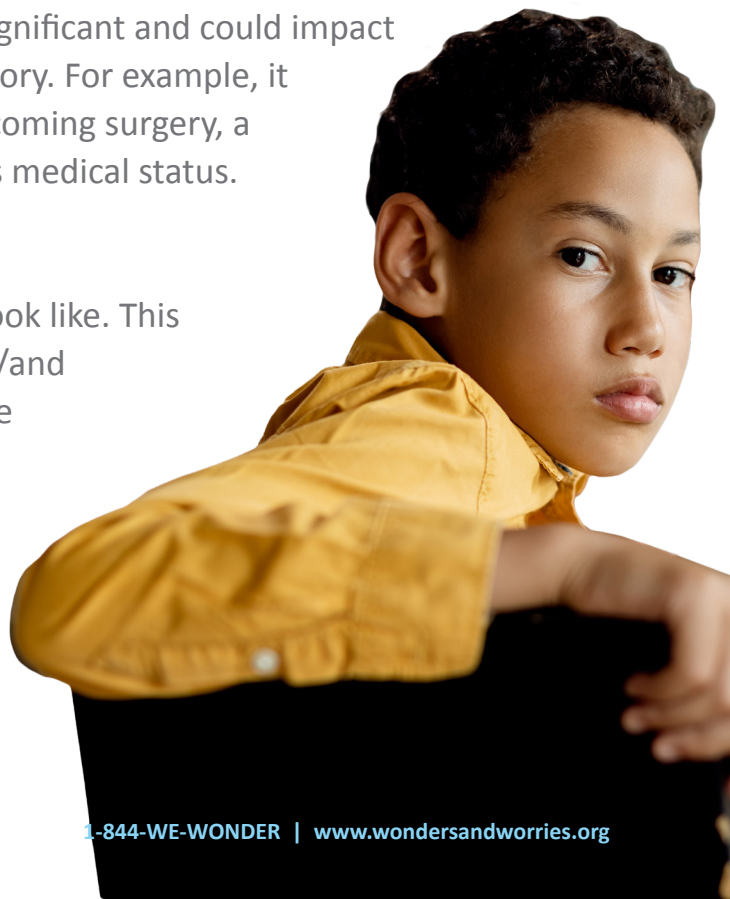
Share with the school team if your child has heightened fears about the health and safety of other family members and strategies for the child to check-in at appropriate times during the school day.

SHARING INFORMATION

Alert the teachers about information that may be significant and could impact a child's coping regarding the parent's illness trajectory. For example, it would be helpful for teachers to know about an upcoming surgery, a new treatment plan and/or a change in the parent's medical status.

School-Day Plan:

With your child, map out what the school day will look like. This could include creating a schedule for before/during/and after school. The more prepared your child feels, the greater sense of safety and security they will have. Additionally, prior to the first day back, having a scheduled playdate with a best friend may be a helpful warm up before entering an environment with many friends/peers.



SAMPLE PLAN FOR SCHOOL-AGE CHILD:

7:00 – 8:00 Eat breakfast, get dressed, and ensure all supplies are in backpack (books, binders, lunch, etc.).

8:00 – 8:30 Bike to school with friend (will meet at bench near the park)

8:35 – 11:45 Morning class (reading, recess, and math)

11:45 – 12:30 Lunch with friends

12:30 – 2:30 Afternoon class (science, and art)

2:35 – 3:00 Bike home with friend (meet in front of the school office to walk to the bike rack)

3:00 – 3:15 Check in with afternoon caregiver to talk about the day's highs and lows.

3:15 – 4:00 A favorite activity

4:00 – 5:30 Homework

5:30 – 8:00 Dinner, reading, and getting ready for bed.

CREATING A SCRIPT...

Part of the plan is also practicing what to say if someone should ask them about their parent's illness. Depending on the child's preference, practicing responses may be helpful: "I'm not ready to talk about that today." Another part of this conversation may include talking with your child about the power of being able to tell their story, rather than people finding out in other ways.

COPING CHEAT SHEET

There will be days that are harder than others for various reasons. Talk about these days in advance with your child and think about supportive strategies that can lessen feelings of being overwhelmed. Create a coping cheat sheet:

"People that love me..."

"Favorite place to think about..."

"_____ always cheers me up when I'm feeling sad."

Planning a monthly meeting with the teachers may help to keep everyone connected and maintain the constant line of support for your child. As well, this will allow for time to make any adjustments to the plan that need to be made to maximize coping. These check-ins also create an opportunity to share about any important events or days that are especially important to your family and may feel harder due to the illness experience (e.g., beginning of soccer when a parent isn't able to be in the stands, Christmas and mom is in the hospital, etc.).

To connect with a Wonders & Worries child life specialist regarding additional support for your child, please contact the helpline at 1-844-WE-WONDER or helpline@wondersandworries.org.



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