



# Tips for Parents of Students with ADHD Returning to School During Covid

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## Tips for Parents of Students with ADHD Returning to School During Covid

All students returning to school this fall will be forced to navigate a new reality, but students struggling with ADHD and other neurodevelopmental disabilities will be exceptionally challenged. The skills that ADHD impairs such as the regulation of attention, activity, impulse, behaviour and emotion, as well as executive function are the very skills that will be challenged in this new environment.

Schools will be expecting children with self regulation and impulsivity issues, as well as impaired skills in remembering routines, planning, organization, and social interaction to follow complex instructions on what they should and should not do. Those in higher grades will also be expected to understand and follow new and varied schedules and conquer online learning with what looks like few additional resources. This new and confusing environment along with the added load on these students' impaired skills will cause them increased stress resulting in more behavioural and academic issues.

Anticipating this, parents are concerned. In some provinces they are being asked to make a decision about their child's return to school with limited information. Parents want to know if their child will be provided additional support to ensure their safety. They wonder if their child will be offered additional understanding for their impairments, or be reprimanded, consequence and ultimately excluded from their classrooms when their impairments prove too great? Of course, they hope for the latter, but some parents who have already experienced their school's lack of understanding of ADHD impairments along with insufficient supports are rightly concerned. Their concern is so great that some parents are choosing to keep their children home. Some without the resources to do so, or others knowing that their child requires the routine and social interaction only school can provide, are opting to send their children and adolescents into the unknown.

### What can parents do to help mitigate this unknown?

1. Contact your child's principal as soon as possible (all correspondence should be written in hard copy or sent by e-mail) to ask questions.
  - What will be your child's support level when returning to school? Can you expect additional resources?
  - Will their environment change from what they are used to, and how?
  - Will the schedule to which they have become accustomed be altered and will it remain consistent after being altered?
  - Will your child's IEPs and/or behavioural plan be expanded to cover these unique circumstances?

- Will you be allowed to meet with the school to offer suggested strategies and supports – work with the school to expand the IEP or behaviour plan?
  - How will you and the school routinely share feedback on your child’s well being and issues that arise?
  - How will the school respond if your child finds it challenging to follow the expected rules due to their ADHD or other impairments? Is exclusion (asking your child to stay home) an option the school might consider? Knowing this will allow you time to decide how you will respond if this does occur.
  - Has your school board developed a policy to deal with these circumstances. If so, ask the principal to send you a copy?
2. If you are not receiving answers to your questions or you are concerned about the answers, contact your board’s special education superintendent (preferable) or your area superintendent.
  3. If you are not contacted in a timely manner or do not receive appropriate answers contact your school trustee, your local provincial representative and your provincial Ministry of Education. (Simply write one brief letter and copy everyone, stating you are concerned about your child’s return to school and require written answers to your questions)
  4. Access this [Template Letter](#) for text that you can simply cut and paste into a letter to the principal, superintendent, Trustee, Ministry or any provincial representative that you wish to contact. This is a very simple letter that you can use as is, or add to, as you see fit.
  5. You have the right to be informed about the environment your child will be going back to prior to making any decisions. You also have the right to expect your child’s needs to be met, within reason, of course. For instance, no school will be able to provide a personal EA for every student.

### **What you can do to assist your child transitioning into this challenging environment?**

Once you have obtained the information about the environment and situation your child will be entering, take steps to prepare them as much as possible.

1. Review how their environment will be different this year. Discuss their worries and your concerns.
2. Review any added rules they will be expected to follow. Do they anticipate difficulties, do you?
3. Find ways to reiterate new rules frequently, practice and role play different scenarios that you and they anticipate will be difficult.
4. If possible, teach your child the language needed to express when they are struggling. This is challenging for many children with ADHD, but teaching them a few simple phrases like “I’m having a hard time right now.” or “I need to get up and move.” can alert school staff that immediate intervention is required so a melt down does not occur.

5. If your child has sensitivities or is anxious about wearing a mask, or seeing others in masks, have them practice wearing a mask and/or seeing family members in masks.

### **Prepare the school**

Meet with the school to:

- inform them of any issues that you expect may arise and strategies that you have developed with your child;
- inform them of triggers that increase your child's stress and any tells (visual cues) that your child's anxiety is escalating;
- inform them about your child's language strategy (above). Stress that the staff will need to pick up on these messages consistently and act quickly for this strategy to work;
- have this accommodation and any others that you have found work added to your child's IEP; and
- discuss acceptable interventions for staff to apply once these messages are relayed. These should be added to the IEP or behavioural plan.

The decisions made during any meeting should be followed up with a written summary. If this does not come from the school follow up with an e-mail to the principal listing the things that were agreed to in the meeting and when you expect them to be implemented. In this e-mail propose a date for a follow-up meeting to review how the strategies are working and if they need to be revised.