

## RETURNING TO SCHOOL CONVERSATION STARTERS AND TIPS FOR PARENTS:

### Conversation starters:

- What are you looking forward to? What are you excited about?
- What makes you nervous about returning to school?
- What changes do you think there will be? (Masks, sitting farther apart, teachers with masks, etc.)
- What changes do you think you will be able to adjust to? (Resiliency!)
- How do you feel about wearing a mask?
- What do you think it will be like to see your friends again?
- If you have to remain socially distant from friends, what are some creative ways you can still connect? (create an air handshake or greeting with friends, still talk to them, write notes, Zoom after school, etc.)
- Why might some students think it's important to wear face masks most of the time? (might have family member who is immunocompromised, might have anxiety about getting sick, parents may have told them they have to)
- Why might some students think it's "silly" or not necessary to wear a face mask all the time? (might not live with anyone immunocompromised, might have low anxiety about illness, might have parents who voice that they think it's not necessary)
- What did you enjoy during the quarantine time at home that we can keep doing as part of a good routine? (family game during dinner, fun meals on occasion, puzzles as breaks when school work gets stressful, etc)
- Once they return, check in often with students:
  - "How are you feeling?"
  - "What are you hearing from others?"
  - "What is difficult or frustrating to adjust to?"
  - "What is going better than you thought?"

### Tips:

- \*The way you talk about returning to school, the pandemic, masks, and other precautions will DIRECTLY IMPACT your student's thoughts, emotions and behaviors! Please talk with them in positive, respectful, honest and encouraging language about the pandemic and returning to school.
- Begin to get them back on a routine schedule BEFORE school starts-set bedtime, alarms set, wake up with alarm, get active, learn something new, practice wearing a mask!
- Acknowledge their sadness about loss of experiences or events-do not try to tell them they don't have it as bad as others. Let them feel the loss (this is big in their lives).
- Minimize their surprises-Find out what you can from your school about what school safety measures will be in regard to pandemic and communicate those ahead of time to students. Find out what precautions teachers will be taking and what will be required of students so they feel prepared.
- Help students focus on what they CAN do! Wash their hands, use hand sanitizer, cough or sneeze into elbow, try to not touch their face, get to see teachers and friends, have fun being creative in connecting with friends and teachers, not make fun of or belittle those that wear face masks all the time or those who don't, keep learning, use laughter and healthy coping skills, maintain routine at home.
- To help reduce fear and anxiety, assure students to do what they CAN, but that if they have symptoms it could be just a cold or flu and if it is COVID-19, typically younger people are recovering well!
- Have older students use UNICEF or World Health Organization to get their facts from AND limit their time reading these facts
- Gently prepare students for the possibility of school closing again-remind them of "constant flexibility" (like silly putty!)

<https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/supporting-your-childs-mental-health-during-covid-19-school-return>