



Preparing Kids for a Return to School

This upcoming school year will look different than any other school year. The many unknowns may make it difficult to answer all the questions your children have about going back to school. The good news is, you can take some steps to prepare yourself and your kids for the transition back to school, whether it's online or in-person.

Find out your specific school district's plan, and then talk to your children openly about what that will look like for your family. Stay calm, and be honest. **Even with a plan in place, things could change quickly, and that's okay.**

Talk with your children about how they feel, and let them know that it's also okay to feel anxious about the unknown changes we will encounter this school year. Communicate to your children that while we may be physically distancing, we

are not alone. Let your children know they can take steps to help keep everyone safe. They can practice safety like washing hands and physical distancing so they become a habit — even when you're not there to offer instruction.

Keep your child's age in mind when holding these discussions. Younger children will do better with short, direct conversations, whereas older children may want to delve into all the possibilities.

Regardless of what your school district plan is right now or how it may evolve further into the school year, establishing a routine with each change will be very important in letting your children know what to expect. This lessens the stress on you and your children and makes these transitions easier for everyone.

Tips for the Three Most Common Types of Back-to-School Plans

IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION

If your school plan is to do in-person instruction, it will look different than it did last fall. These changes could include remaining with the same group of kids for the entire day, having desks further apart, and wearing a face covering to lower the risk of spreading COVID-19.

Review proper hand washing techniques with your child at home. Consider packing a water bottle since water fountains may not be available. Develop a daily routine that includes packing hand sanitizer and back-up face coverings before school and washing hands immediately upon return home.

Now more than ever, it will be important to keep your child home from school if they have a temperature higher than 100.4 and/or have a sore throat, cough, or other signs of illness.



AT-HOME INSTRUCTION

Developing a routine is especially important if your child will be doing at-home instruction. Create a consistent, flexible schedule, and commit to it. Try to find a space for learning that is free of distractions and noise.

If your child receives speech, occupational or physical therapy, or mental health or behavioral services, ask your school how these services will continue during this time of virtual learning.

To help your children maintain friendships, identify opportunities for them to connect with friends either virtually or in-person (using physical distancing).

HYBRID INSTRUCTION

Many school districts are looking at a hybrid model, which will include both in-person and at-home instruction either with partial days in-person or fewer full days in-person. With a hybrid model, most families' biggest challenge will be with the schedule, especially for those with several children who end up with different in-person/at-home schedules. Creating a schedule for each child — and identifying who will be responsible for them during at-home time — can lower everyone's stress and ensure your children remain safe.

Check-in with your children throughout the year, especially if you see changes in their behavior or mood, as those are signs they are having a hard time adjusting. Tell them it's okay to talk with you about how they feel, and understand it's okay for you to ask for help from other professionals, such as your primary care doctor, if there are on-going or concerning changes in your children's behavior or mood.

Legislative Updates:

First Police Reform Bills Have Passed!

July saw Pennsylvania's first two police reform bills become law, marking the first legislative actions in PA since the protests over the killing of George Floyd at the capital. These bills address and attempt to reduce the systemic racism and oppression that exist in our commonwealth.

House Bill 1841 requires that the state develop a database of personnel records of misconduct allegations involving police officers that police departments can check before making hiring decisions.

House Bill 1910 requires police officers to take a post-traumatic stress disorder test every two years or within 30 days of a lethal use-of-force. It requires training in several areas, including:

- ▶ Recognition of implicit bias
- ▶ De-escalation techniques
- ▶ Identification of suspected child abuse

This bill also establishes the efficacy of conducting forensic interviewing of victims of child abuse within the setting of a children's advocacy center. All of these things will better equip police officers to interact with people from diverse racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds.

These bills are a step in the right direction toward transparency and meaningful changes in our criminal justice system, which makes all Pennsylvanians safe.

The inclusion of training regarding child abuse and the use of child advocacy centers is a huge win for better practices with PA's children.

VIRTUAL MANDATED REPORTER TRAINING

PFSA is offering FREE 3-hour virtual training for mandated reporters of child abuse. This training is approved by the Departments of State, Human Services, and Education and meets all requirements for Mandated Reporter Training in Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse. To obtain information about this training and available sessions, please email training@pa-fsa.org.

Giving in the Time of COVID-19

As you ponder the experiences of the past few months and look forward to an unwritten future, many things seem undecided and uncertain... about work, about school, and about plans for a holiday season that will be upon us before we know it!

Fortunately, there is one thing entirely unchanged, and that is PFSA's commitment to providing education, support, and training programs so that all children can grow and thrive free from abuse and neglect.

PFSA is working diligently to create new courses and resources for professionals and volunteers, support Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) Network agencies, and meet the needs of families and children during this time of great economic, emotional, and physical stress.

We ask that you support these essential services by making a gift to PFSA — and help us keep PA's children safe from abuse and neglect. Please contact Director of Development Ann Moffitt, ACFRE, at amoffitt@pa-fsa.org or 800-448-4906 to discuss options for giving, or visit pafsa.org/donate to make your gift online.