SPOTLIGHT ON SAFEGUARDING

WORKING TOGETHER TO KEEP OUR YOUNG PEOPLE SAFE

September 2026 | Primary | What parents and carers need to know about: Back to school | Device boundaries

Settling back into school: Supporting your child through the new term

The start of a new school year can be an exciting time, but it can also bring a mix of emotions for children. While some settle quickly, others may need a little longer to adjust to early mornings, busy classrooms, new routines and being away from home again. Even children who usually enjoy school can feel unsettled during the first few weeks. With patience, consistency and reassurance, parents can play an important role in helping their child feel safe, confident and ready to learn.

Supporting emotional wellbeing

It's common for children to be more tired, emotional or clingy during the first few weeks of term as they adjust to being back at school. They may need extra reassurance while they settle into new routines and friendships.

Try to:

- acknowledge their feelings without rushing to fix them
- let them know it's okay to have good days and difficult days
- keep home as a calm, predictable place where they feel listened to.

Feeling understood helps children build confidence and resilience over time.

The importance of sleep

After the summer holidays, many children have become used to later bedtimes and lie-ins. As the school term gets underway, it can take time for their bodies to adjust back to earlier mornings. A lack of sleep doesn't just leave children feeling tired; it can also affect their concentration, learning, emotional regulation and behaviour at school.

To help your child get enough rest:

- keep bedtimes and wake-up times as consistent as possible, even at weekends
- create a calming bedtime routine, such as reading together or listening to quiet music
- avoid screens for at least an hour before bed, as the light from devices can make it harder to fall asleep
- make sure bedrooms are calm, dark and comfortable to support a good night's sleep.

A well-rested child is often better able to manage the challenges of the school day, from learning in the classroom to navigating friendships and coping with big emotions.

When might your child need extra support?

It's normal for children to take time to settle back into school. However, if they remain very anxious, distressed about attending school, unusually withdrawn or emotional or frequently complain of headaches or tummy aches, speak to your child's class teacher. Early support can make a big difference.

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Resetting device boundaries after the summer holidays

For many families, the summer holidays bring a more relaxed approach to technology. Children may spend longer watching videos, playing games or using tablets and routines around screen time, bedtimes and family time often become more flexible. This is completely understandable, but once school returns, those holiday habits can make it harder for children to concentrate, get enough sleep and settle back into their school routine.

The start of a new term provides the perfect opportunity to reset expectations around technology. Rather than introducing lots of new rules, think of it as returning to the routines that help your child learn, play, sleep and thrive.

Why children may find it difficult

If your child complains that the new boundaries are "unfair" or says, "But I could do it in the holidays," they're not being difficult, they're adjusting to a change in routine.

Remember that:

- holiday routines are often very different from school routines
- devices have become part of their daily habit over the summer
- children thrive when expectations are clear, predictable and consistent.

Creating family expectations

Children respond best when they know what is expected of them. Try agreeing a few simple family rules that everyone understands.

For example:

- devices are put away during meals
- homework is completed before recreational screen time
- screens are switched off at least an hour before bed
- parents know which games and apps their child is using
- children ask before downloading new apps or games.

What if they push back?

It's completely normal for children to be disappointed when holiday screen time comes to an end. Stay calm, acknowledge how they feel and remind them why the routines are changing.

You might say:

"I know you've enjoyed having more time on your tablet over the holidays. Now that school has started again, we need routines that help you get enough sleep so you can concentrate in class better."

Model healthy habits

Children learn by watching us. By putting your own phone away during family time and avoiding screens before bed, you show that healthy digital habits are important for everyone.