Some Suggestions to Support Autistic Students Going Back to School

We have listed some ideas to help you make plans for children returning to school. These ideas will support all children who may have increased anxiety at this time and therefore need more explicit, simplified information that is visually concrete and reassuring.

* **Try to send out a photograph of their new classroom and new layout before they come back to school**
* **Try to send out a photo of their teaching team, this will reassure them if it is the same team or prepare them for different adults in their class**
* **A simple visual schedule showing days in school in the week will help to adjust to new routines if students aren’t in every day ( visuals for parents supplied)**
* **Let children know they might have their temperature taken when they come into school**
* **It will be easier for autistic children if they attend every day for some of the day rather than only on certain days but this will be determined by each schools’ risk assessments and decisions re staffing etc.**
* **If some staff will be wearing masks maybe send them a picture of people wearing masks to prepare them for this change (teachers/staff doing first aid for Covid 19 ) Write names of staff members underneath the photos of them with their masks on as some children may struggle to recognise them.**
* **Possibly draw smiley faces or something humorous on staff masks to make them less intimidating.**
* **Make sure there is a visual plan for each day on the wall so everyone can see**
* **Some children may want their own personal visual plan at their desks**
* **Some children will need to know which children will be in the bubble/pod/class**
* **Some children will want very specific information about what to bring in for their packed lunch**
* **Show new arrangements for lunch with pictures/photos**
* **Explicitly tell children what play time will look like and what equipment they can use**
* **Keep new rules clearly displayed in the classroom and around school**
* **Make sure there are handwashing visual schedules in every toilet/bathroom ( visuals supplied)**
* **Introduce new rules visually and practically through activities and plenty of repetition to embed new routines**
* **Remember many autistic children will need to generalise rules from one setting to another e.g. children will need to practise social distancing in lining up in the classroom and the playground and the school hall**
* **Use social stories and visual symbols to help children remember and embed new routines and safety rules. Re-read stories until they become like mantras (resources supplied)**
* **Create new routines for using toys and equipment - think Montessori style and ethos**
* **Demarcate areas of the room using colour coding, taped floor areas and symbols**
* **Create a quiet zone with visual rules for use displayed and a visual waiting list of names/photos for children waiting to use it**
* **You could try using a 5 point scale check-in for the whole class to use through the day (visuals supplied)**
* **Make time for physical relaxation and mindfulness activities throughout every day – the most important thing is for everybody to feel safe and happy in school. Learning will come later (visuals supplied).**

**Please let us know if there are any other resources or visual supports that you would find useful.**