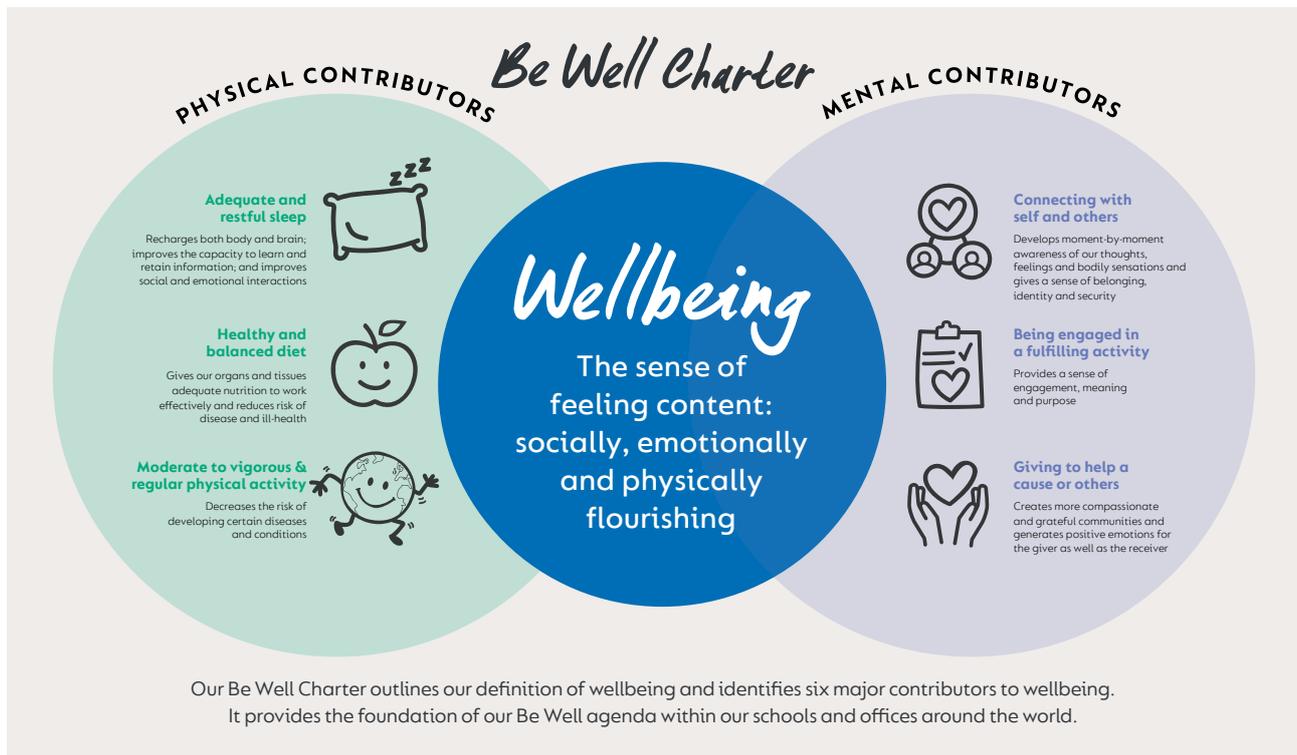


Be Well Tips

Return to School

The return to school this year will not resemble any other. There is much talk about the 'new normal' following the Covid-19 pandemic, but in reality, there is no 'normal' and it is likely that any sense of predictable equilibrium is still some way off. Therefore, how do we best prepare our children for their return to school – whatever that might look like for them and wherever they are in the world? It is a fluid situation that impacts all regions, countries, schools, families and individuals differently, so while it is not possible to give specific and targeted advice, hopefully some of these general tips will be helpful for parents.

For the return to school and beyond, remember the contributors to wellbeing. The things that build the foundation of our wellbeing and that you will have worked hard to include during the period of online learning are still crucial to maintain (see our *Be Well Charter* below). Ensuring that these are central to your child's day to day life will help them both now and in the future, enabling them to establish lifelong healthy habits.



- **Be mindful of the potential resistance to increased boundaries around screen time.** Many children have been online more during this period, but as and when regulations allow a more normal return to school and socialising in person with friends and family, then discuss a move towards pre-Covid screen time boundaries. Emphasise the importance of the contributors to wellbeing in your discussions, as well as exploring what your child is using their devices for as not all types of screen and technology use are equal.

- **Re-establish a school routine.** This is a key part of helping your child adjust from lockdown or holiday mode, back to a 'ready to learn' mode. A central part of this routine is bedtime, and given that sleep is especially crucial for their learning, relationships, physical and mental health, this should be a priority as the return to school comes closer.
- **Manage your own anxiety.** It is a worrying time to be a parent, and it is completely normal to feel concerned about this period and the impact on your child. However, early evidence suggests that most children are looking forward to returning to school and are not overly concerned about it. Try to deal with any understandable worries that you may have away from your child's earshot as this will allow your child to express things that are genuinely on their mind, rather than things they might have heard you being worried about.
- **Be your child's primary and trusted information source about Covid-19.** If they are young, then you can control and filter the most appropriate information for them, and if they are older, help guide them to reliable news providers. Media over-exposure is unlikely to be a good thing for anyone at any age, as it can increase overall anxiety about the pandemic, especially if viewed before bed. Try to limit household consumption of Covid-specific news in general.
- **Say 'I don't know the answer'.** Being honest about the uncertainty relating to current elements of life such as further lockdown restrictions, travel quarantine and future regulations can help your child adapt more easily when changes occur in the future and also prevent pinning their hopes on things that you as a parent cannot guarantee.
- **Remember, your child is better prepared to deal with a different return to school now than they might have been in the past.** Children have had to cope with a lot of change over the last few months - they are used to seeing everyone wearing masks and keeping their distance, they have learnt how to communicate with their friends without touching them and they have been away from their grandparents and other family members for months. They have dealt with these changes and highlighted just how adaptable and capable they are.
- **Embrace those things that remain the same.** While the world looks unfamiliar in many ways, there is also much that remains the same about the process of returning to school. Appreciate these little things, be it getting a new bag or stationery, chatting about their new teacher or friends or even complaining about their homework! Allow the routines of starting school to help re-structure daily life again – regardless of whether that schooling is a little different from usual.

And finally, please work with your child's school. Remember that you are a team, working together in an unfamiliar environment but with the same goal of helping your child to be safe and happy, to learn and to thrive.

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