RETURN TO SCHOOL KIT FOR CARERS

A resource for carers of children and young people in Out of Home Care returning to school following the impacts of COVID-19

fostering CONNECTIONS

Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

This resource has been put together to help carers of children and young people in Out of Home Care (OOHC) who are returning to school following the impact of COVID-19 (also known as Coronavirus).

Please note: Social or physical distancing, by this we mean actions to help reduce the risk of infection and slow the spread of coronavirus. Throughout this resource we will use the term 'physical distancing', to clarify that while we are physically creating space, our social connections are more important than ever.

How to use this resource

This kit provides suggestions, tips, and resources for OOHC households. Each section includes:
- General information on the topic
- Tips and practical suggestions
- Further resources

As COVID-19 is a developing situation we urge you to regularly check for updates to advice and restrictions at:
https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-daily-update

For information on COVID-19 including restrictions and relief packages visit:
https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus

Support for carers

Additional funding has been granted to support caregivers during COVID-19. For more information about extra supports for carers speak with your case manager and visit https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/information-community-services-coronavirus-disease-covid-19

Disclaimer

Fostering Connections, part of the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, has prepared this resource with support from the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education and Training. This resource provides general information only; your agency (if applicable) or support body is the best place to seek information specific to the child or young person in your care.

Many of the resources provided are accessible online – always ensure that supervision of children and young people follows the eCommissioner's best-practice recommendations. You may find more information here: https://www.esafety.gov.au/parents

For more information on staying safe online for carers and young people, please see the Staying at Home for Foster Carers toolkit:
https://tinyurl.com/stayathometoolkitfostercarers

With thanks to carers
We are all doing our best to get by in a changing, difficult time. Thank you for your incredible commitment to Victorian children and young people.

Contents

1. Return to school

After a period of remote learning, the Victorian Government has announced a staged approach to returning to school. Carers during this time have undertaken an incredible additional task, supporting children and young people through remote learning, or helping them continue to attend school as a part of a vulnerable cohort. This incredible feat has come during a time where there has already been significant stress and panic, so thank you for your continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in your care.

Key dates

Tuesday 26 May Stage 1	All Prep, year 1 and year 2 students, specialist school students, as well as VCE and VCAL students will return to on-site learning at government schools. **Vulnerable students in years 3 to 10, and children in those years whose parents or carers cannot work from home, can continue to attend school on-site as needed during this period.**
Tuesday 9 June Stage 2	Students in the broader year 3 to 10 cohort will return to on-site learning at government schools.

The additional time between 26 May and 9 June is designed to give the Government and the Chief Health Officer time to monitor and evaluate the effects that the return to school by other year levels has on the increased movement of people and transmission within the community. More information for parents and carers is available from the Department of Education on:

- returning to school:
  https://www.education.vic.gov.au/parents/Pages/stagedreturn_overview.aspx
- learning from home:
  https://www.education.vic.gov.au/parents/learning/Pages/home-learning.aspx

Please note: This is an evolving situation. The current goal is to return children and young people to school; however, school closures may occur again due to COVID-19. Remote learning may need to happen again in the future. If this is the case, consider what worked well during that time and what support you would need going forward to make a transition as smooth as possible.

Can I choose not to return to a child to school?
Once a year level has returned, all students will be expected to attend school as normal. This means if you choose to keep a child or young person in your care home after their year level has returned to on-site schooling, the Department of Education and Training (DET) can no longer support their learning from home.

This does not apply to children who need to be absent for health or medical reasons. For those families, please contact DET so they can make an appropriate plan and discuss the proposed plans with the child or young person's case manager and care team.

Loaned devices
A child or young person in your care may have had access to a loaned device, such as a laptop or dongle. As students return to learning on-site, schools will ask that devices are brought to school.

Independent schools
Many independent schools have followed state government advice to switch to remote learning during this time. It is expected that independent schools will also be following the return to school advice. If a child or young person in your care is attending an independent school, confirm with the school the expectations around returning.

Day care and kindergarten
Many day cares and kindergartens have continued to operate during this time. Visit the Department of Education website for further information on coronavirus: https://education.vic.gov.au/parents/Pages/coronavirus-advice-parents

Understanding the stay at home guidelines
Victoria has recently eased restrictions including restrictions that constantly change and impact our current way of life. As restrictions are subject to rapid change, it is important to regularly check the status on the official website: https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/state-emergency
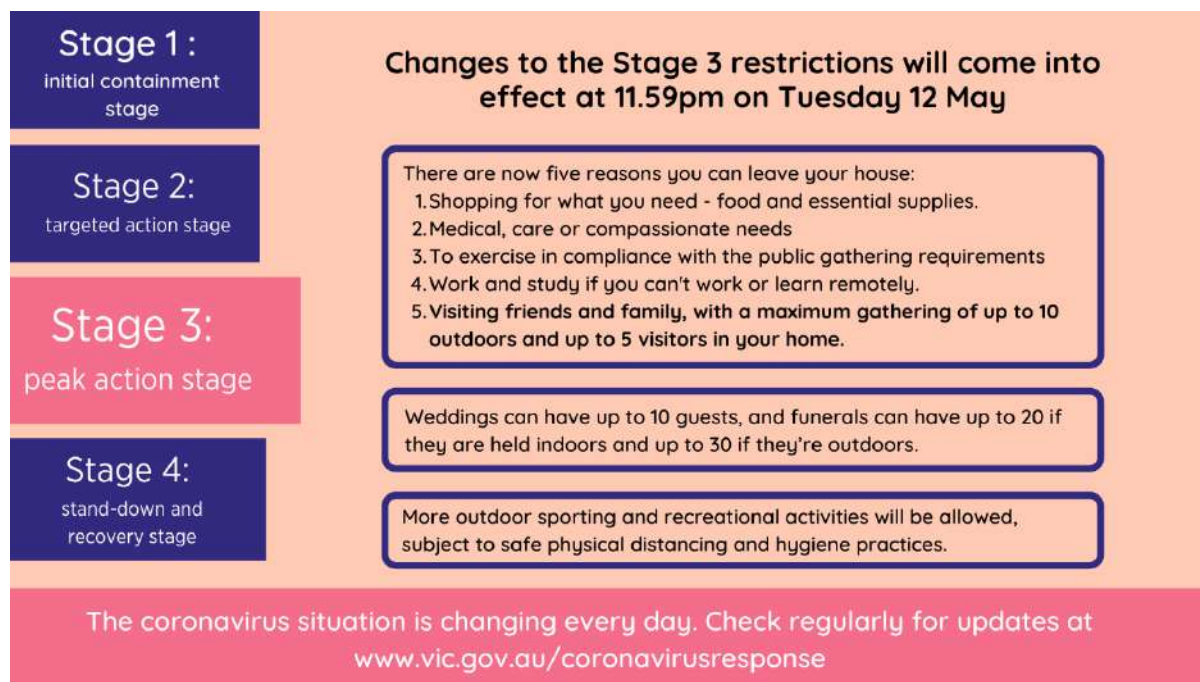
As of 11.59pm Tuesday May 12th, 2020, the 'State of Emergency' extended until May 31st, 2020, and the directions from the Victorian Government were eased, allowing for changes to movement and activity in Victoria.

There are now five 'essential reasons' to leave the home:
1. shopping for food and necessary goods/services
2. accessing medical care or providing caregiving
3. attending work or education where this cannot be done at home
4. exercise and recreational activity that adheres to physical distancing and hygiene guidelines
5. visiting friends/family in the home.

Remember, these guidelines will change - you can find a host of information on the restrictions, including answers to frequently asked questions, here: https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/stay-home-restrictions-coronavirus

About testing
Currently, testing is extended so that anyone who feels unwell can and should be tested for COVID-19. If you are not sure – get tested. This advice is subject to change so ensure you are checking:
https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/your-coronavirus-covid-19-questions-answered

You can help stop the spread of COVID-19 by practicing physical distancing, hand washing, good hygiene, thorough cleaning, and staying home if you are sick.

You can find answers to a range of questions about coronavirus, including travel advice, testing and risks here: https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-frequently-asked-questions

If you have concerns about COVID-19, please contact the Coronavirus Hotline at **1800-675-398**. Please leave 000 for emergencies only.

2. Supporting children and young people returning to school

We know that transitions of any sort may be triggering or challenging particularly for children and young people who have experienced developmental trauma. In response to returning to school, children and young people may experience a range of emotions such as excitement, nervousness, fear, and concern.

What this means for carers
- Feeling worried and uncertain may cause children and young people who have experienced developmental trauma to regress in their behaviour and become unsettled.
- Heightened emotions in response to a change in routine or transition may cause children and young people to become hypervigilant (overly alert and sensitive to their environment), but too much stress may cause them to feel overwhelmed and/or overstimulated which may lead to an unsuccessful or challenging return to school.
- Supporting children and young people in your care through the return to school requires early discussion, acknowledgement of uncertainty, and reassurance wherever possible.

Explaining the return to school
Use age-appropriate explanations to talk about their current learning plans and what to expect. Children and young people may worry more if they aren't given any information so prepare to have a direct discussion about the return to school to reassure them, help them understand what is happening, and what they can do to help.

Remember to set the emotional tone; model calmness when talking about the return to school. Consider asking what they know about the situation and give them an opportunity to ask questions.

For more information on how to speak to children and young people about COVID-19, please visit page 6 of our Staying at Home Toolkit:
https://tinyurl.com/stayathometoolkitfostercarers

Remember, children and young people have varying needs based on their age and stage of development; see the picture below for a generalised guide.

EARLY PRIMARY SCHOOL

- Balance plans to return to school with reassurances that their schools and homes are safe

- Remind them that adults are there to help keep them healthy and to take care of them.

- Discuss handwashing as a step in staying healthy at school and home.

- Use language such as "adults are working hard to keep you safe."

UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOL

- They may be more vocal in asking questions about whether they truly are safe and what will happen if COVID-19 comes to their school or community.

- They may need assistance separating reality from rumour and fantasy.

- Discuss efforts of school and community leaders to prevent germs from spreading.

HIGH SCHOOL

- They may be able to discuss COVID-19 in a more in-depth fashion and can be referred directly to appropriate sources of information.

- Provide honest, accurate information about the current status of their schooling. Having such knowledge can help them feel a sense of control.

- Plan together what the return to school will look like.

Remember
Be observant if there is a change in their behaviour, for example:
- Are they not enjoying activities that they did before?
- Has there been a change in appetite or sleeping?
- Are there unusual irritations or emotional responses?
- Are they expressing unusual or negative thoughts?
- Are they putting themselves in at-risk situations?

Focus on strengths and what has worked well and currently works well.

Practice emotionally connecting, before trying to 'correct' any concerns. When supporting a child or young person who has experienced developmental trauma you must try to help them feel safe before you try to manage any challenging behaviours. Consider using the PACE model (Play, Acceptance, Curiosity, and Empathy) if you ever feel stuck. This is also something your case manager can support you with. Further information on this can be found below in Section 5.

Establish a clear transition routine, just as you had established an isolation routine. Co-design the routine with the child/young person in your care as this will facilitate an open and active conversation about any concerns they have and involve them in finding solutions.

Remember to ask children and young people questions:

How do you feel about going back to school?

What can help make it easier for you?

What worries you about about going back?

What makes you feel excited about going back?

How can we work together to help support you?

Tips and suggestions
- Considering children and young peoples' age/stage, speak openly with them and let them know you are there for them, care for them, and ask what they need from you.
- Let them know there are ways that this transition can be made easier and help them access their support network. Ask them what they need to make this transition easier, and work through ideas together.
- Help them practice self-care and model good self-care. This can include exercise, positive self-talk, relaxation techniques, encourage healthy diet and sleep, support social interaction, and include them in finding strategies to make the return to school successful.
- Check out the Return to School plan below and see if the child or young person you care for may benefit from this.

If in doubt, always speak to your case manager and care team!

Start the conversation with the school
If you think that a child or young person in your care is likely to have trouble, including heightened behaviours, transitioning back to on-site learning, speak to your school.

If you feel you need additional support to resolve concerns, have a look at the Supporting children and young people with learning during COVID-19 factsheet available here:
https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/carers-and-children-care-coronavirus

Check out **section 5** of this resource for more information on school refusal and dealing with heightened behaviour.

Further resources
- For further resources on supporting a return to school, please visit: https://headspace.org.au/friends-and-family/back-to-school-information/
- For further resources on managing stress related to education, please visit: https://headspace.org.au/friends-and-family/parents-guide-tips-for-managing-stress-and-problems-at-school/

Household Return to School Plan

We have:
☐ Spoken to our care team and/or case manager, and support network (if applicable)
☐ Planned the school routine
☐ Informed the school of any issues or needs
☐ Cancelled/moved online appointments
☐ Ensured medications are up to date (if no, write what is still required below)
☐ Packed any devices that need to be returned to the school

Add any other details to consider below:
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

We are worried about: (physical distancing, hygiene, classwork, change in routine, etc.)
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

We will be dealing with these worries by: (discuss with your agency and school what supports and ideas are available for dealing with these concerns, what can the household do to make the transition easier?)
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3. Getting back to the classroom safely

It is likely that our daily lifestyles are not going to look 'normal' for quite a while. Although at the time of this resource, DET have not announced detailed plans of what the return to school will look like on a daily basis to manage COVID-19, we can predict that there will be some changes in how classrooms and recess breaks are managed.

You may have concerns about the return to school, including how it may impact your health and safety. These concerns are valid for the entire household. Although we may not know what the future holds a good option is to return to basics. Reassure your household and practice self-care.

Consider the basics of hygiene to be at the front of your household's mind. For example: hand washing regularly, coughing and sneezing into an elbow and other preventative infection control measures.

What this means for children and young people
By being prepared and aware, we can support the children and young people returning to school so that they know what to expect and how to keep themselves safe. This will create a sense of stability, security, and control during an unusual and unpredictable environment.

Some children and young people may be anxious about getting sick, while others may struggle with maintaining hygiene standards that prevent the spread. By helping them understand, we can ease the transition throughout the changes.

What this means for carers
Caregivers may be nervous about how a return to school for children may impact them, and their household. It is normal to feel unsettled during this period. There may be concerns about infection control, seeing others and the child or young person's well-being, and how the change will impact your entire household. If you have any concerns that you do not feel comfortable addressing with your support network or case manager, please consider contacting your support body for further support (see the further resources section on page 12).

Additionally, consider accessing an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for confidential counselling and support via your support agency if available.

Some practical ideas
Consider and plan what the major changes will be – have open conversations about the current rules and why we cannot do things how we used to do them. Some things will feel the same for them, others will be new and unusual.

Have age/stage appropriate conversations about what things will look like soon – Will you still be working from home? What hygiene practices need to remain or increase? Will they be returning to sports or recreational activities?

Tips and suggestions
- If you haven't already, start a routine of consistent handwashing when returning to the home or visiting friends/family, and teach the child/young person in your care how to use hand sanitiser when they are out of the home.
- Have conversations about being honest and upfront if they feel sick so that you can keep them and others safe.
- Let them know that the adults in their life are making sure they are looked after, and that the rules are in place to keep them, and the community safe.
- Do not be afraid to ask for help! These are strange times, and we are all in this together.

If you think a child or young person may benefit from using it as a visual plan for their school return, check out the worksheet on p 13.

Further resources
If you are a foster carer, please consider contacting the Foster Care Association (FCAV) at https://www.fcav.org.au/

If you are a permanent carer, please consider contacting Permanent Care and Adoptive Families (PCAF) at http://www.pcafamilies.org.au/

If you are a kinship carer, please consider contacting Kinship Carers Victoria (KCV) at http://kinshipcarersvictoria.org/

Going back to school after COVID-19

We have been staying at home to help fight COVID-19. Something I liked about staying at home was...

Soon I will be going back to my school. I am very excited to get back to school so I can...

I go back to school on a

_____

I will go back for ____ days a week

When I think about going back to school I feel

When I go back to school it will be different than before.

When I arrive at school I will say goodbye to _____ at the gate.

At school we will all be washing our hands a lot more.

I will give other people space while we are talking and playing.

I will also be sneezing into my elbow.

I will try to only touch my things.

If I feel unsure I will make sure to ask my teacher...

I have not seen my friends in a while. When I go back to school it may be noisy. If this happens I will...

4. If a child is still attending school

The children or young people in your care may have already been attending school for the last few weeks during the COVID-19 shut down. However, this would have been structured as a remote learning arrangement within the school setting as opposed to the active learning environment they had been in prior to the pandemic.

Impact of school returns
As schools move towards full student attendance and active learning, the children and young people in your care will still experience a transition to a different routine and environment as they may have spent the last few weeks engaged in self-directed learning activities with little peer contact and engagement.

As discussed above, this may be unsettling, and they may need your support to put them at ease and encourage a smooth transition. This will ensure that they feel safe and secure in the school and home environment.

Some practical ideas
As information is released, discuss any new practices they can expect at school.

There may be new processes for infection control, confirm with the school what the information is and who the child or young person in your care can contact if they have any questions.

Communicate with your school and the care team. Let them know if your child has been sick recently or is sick. If your child tests positive to COVID-19, let the school know so they can communicate with and get guidance from local health authorities.

Once again, ask for help! Talk to your school nurse, school psychologist, school counsellor or school social worker if your child is having difficulties because of anxiety or stress related to COVID-19. They can give guidance and support to your child at school.

Make sure to follow all instructions from your school.

Tips and suggestions
- First and foremost, give yourself a break! It can be confusing and overwhelming when information is changing every day, and things are never going to be perfect. Focus on what works for your household.
- Reach out to your support network for ideas about what has worked well for them and if there is anything they can do to help ease things in the household during these periods of transition.
- Remember to include the child or young person in your care in conversations about changes to restrictions and how that will impact routines at school. This will help them feel in control and informed. Do this in an age appropriate way. For information on how to speak to children about COVID-19 please visit the Staying at Home Toolkit for Foster Carers: https://tinyurl.com/stayathometoolkitfostercarers

Further resources
- For more information please visit DHHS: https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/carers-and-children-care-coronavirus

5. School refusal and heightened behaviours

School refusal is often connected to anxiety about the child or young person's environment or circumstance. It is an emotional issue that needs an empathetic response.

Education may be a complex space for children and young people in OoHC, especially following a disruption in their environment such as the one caused by COVID-19.
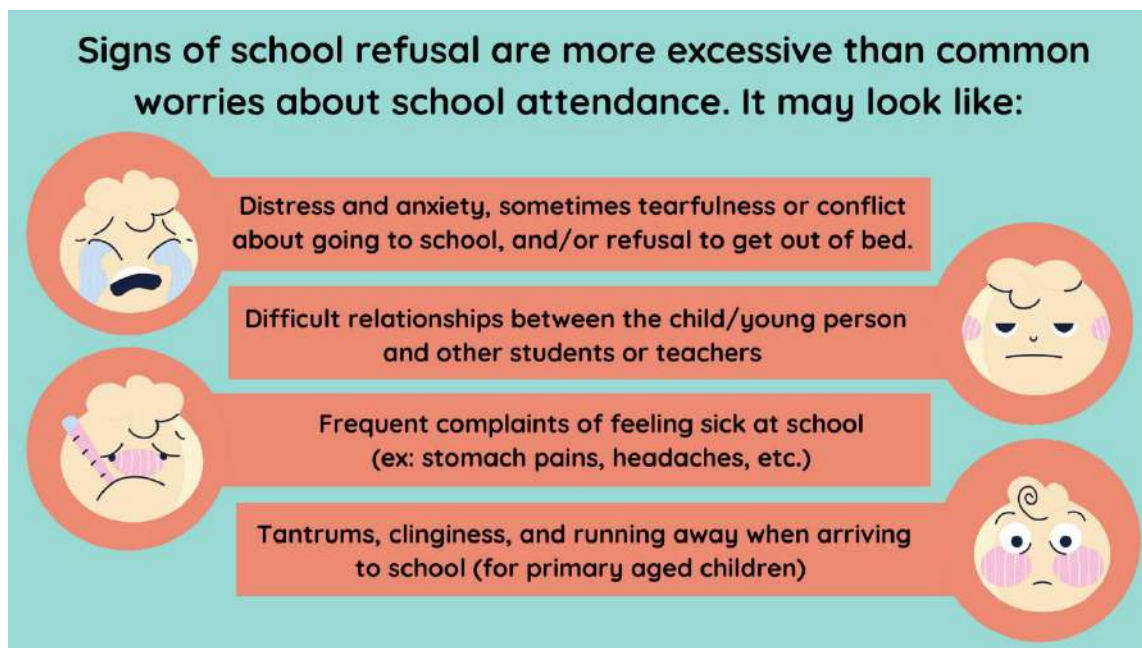
Some children in OOHC may already have difficulties engaging in the school setting whether it be in academic or social situations; it is okay to seek help for this. Long absences from education are known to make returning more of a challenge.

Long-term disengagement from education can have lifelong consequences for a child or young person's mental health, self-esteem, emotional and social needs, and future education and occupational goals.

Reasons for school refusal
School refusal is unique for each child and young person. Trying to understand the reason behind it will support a solution. Common causes of school refusal may relate to (but are not limited to):
- Anxiety about their circumstance and separation from family
- Worry about social interactions at school, especially after a pro-longed break or if there have been historic issues such as bullying or conflict.
- Changes in their education environment; even natural transitions such as changing grade levels, programs, or having a new teacher.
- Anxiety about academic performance and pressure, and/or if they have a learning disability
- Disruption in routine or the home environment (changes in placement, changes in family contact, etc).

Signs of school refusal are more excessive than common worries about school attendance. It may look like:

- Distress and anxiety, sometimes tearfulness or conflict about going to school, and/or refusal to get out of bed.
- Difficult relationships between the child/young person and other students or teachers
- Frequent complaints of feeling sick at school (ex: stomach pains, headaches, etc.)
- Tantrums, clinginess, and running away when arriving to school (for primary aged children)

School refusal can be frustrating, stressful, and upsetting for carers and young people alike. This is likely to be heightened because of the pandemic.

Some practical Ideas

Be aware of what and how school refusal presents in the child/young person in you care, and how you can support them to have a smooth transition back to school.

It is important to address school refusal early. Model problem solving at home, and effective communication to help ensure the child or young person to do the same.

When both yourself and the child or young person are settled, have an empathetic conversation about their views about going back to school or their worries around school.

Supporting behaviours and emotions

If you noticed that your child or young person is showing signs of unsettled or disruptive behaviour about the return to school, consider the Behaviour Iceberg. Consider the function of the behaviours – some children and young people may engage in self-soothing behaviours such as rocking, masturbation, overeating, sucking fingers, food hoarding, or self-harm when stressed or triggered. Think of behaviour as a language that is meant to communicate the child or young person's needs.

The reason it is important to support a child or young person to be calm when having difficult conversations or making decisions is that when a child or young person is stressed or heightened, their brain stops thinking rationally. This happens to all of us! This is called "Fight, Flight, Freeze" and can be managed by emotionally connecting with the child or young person.

Another tool to help calm a child, young person, or even yourself is "Name it to tame it". When you name a behaviour, and become aware of how you are feeling, you naturally regulate it. You can find more about this if you research Dr Daniel Siegel and Dr. Daniel Hughes.

Another tool to re-direct behaviour is the PACE Model by Dr. Daniel Hughes. This uses interactions based on playfulness, acceptance, curiosity, and empathy to help children and young people emotionally regulate. Speak with your support network about how the PACE model can fit into your household.

This video by Sarah Naish is a wonderful resource for caregivers to consider: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-oWUZNhEXo

Helping children understand their emotions
Behaviour management strategies evolve, and change based on the function of the behaviour and the needs of the child. If there are behaviours that often resurface for a child or young person in your care, discuss them with your case manager and care team to plan to manage them. During a time of transition, you may see a "regression" in behaviour, where old behaviours resurface because the child or young person is unsettled.

A change in routine such as a return to school may result in a regression in behaviours.

You can help children or young people understand their emotions and behaviours with Dan Siegel's Hand Brain Model and explaining 'flipping your lid'. When someone 'flips their lid' their thinking brain is no longer in control, until their emotions can calm and regulate. The Hand Brain model is a great way for carers to understand, and explain to children and young people what is happening when we 'flip our lid'.

You can watch Dr Dan Seigel explaining the model here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gm9CIJ74Oxw

When our brain is working efficiently both the upper and mid brain are communicating effectively. Information comes in and is processed logically. Sometimes too much information is coming in and the upper brain disconnects. We then "Flip our lid" and cannot acess the functions provided by the upper brain.

The upper brain is the "thinking" brain. It is accessed for logic, socialising, and reasoning. The lower brain is the survival part of the brain. It is the fight or flight mode of the brain. When you 'flip your lid' – the upper and lower brain are no longer communicating. Logic no longer influcences emotions. This is a handy tool to use at home and at school.

The hand model of the brain

Daniel J. Siegel, *Mindsight* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2010), p.15
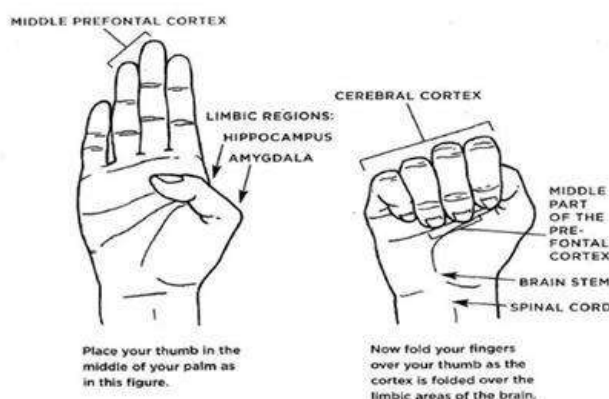
Everyone 'flips their lid' from time to time. By understanding **how** and **when** it happens, we can learn to control when we feel we might '**flip our lids**'.
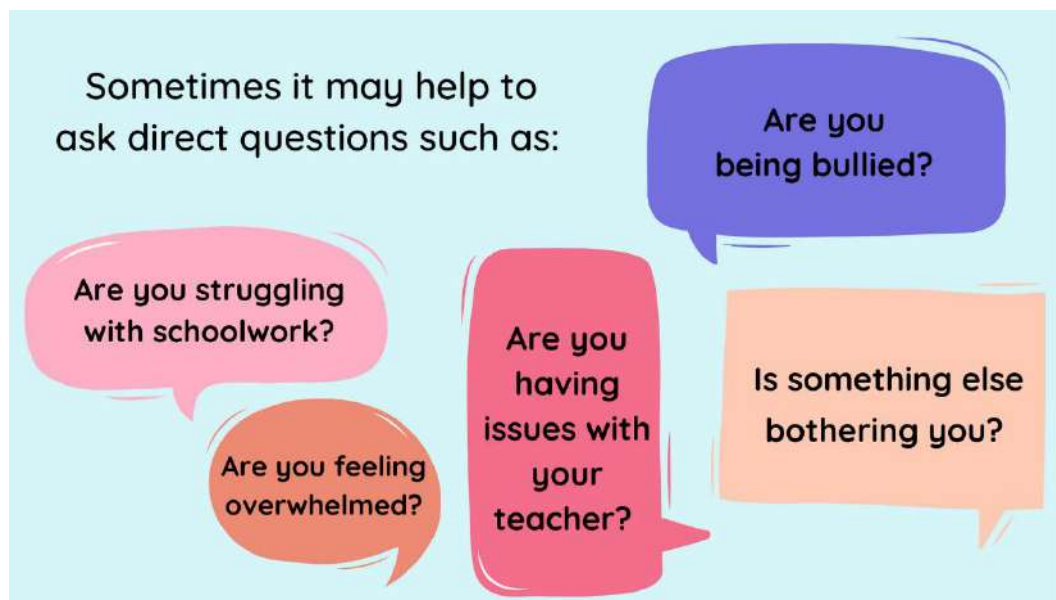
For more information you may also wish to look at Chapter 10 – Dealing with Heightened Behaviours at the Staying at Home Toolkit for Foster Carers: https://tinyurl.com/stayathometoolkitfostercarers

Plan with the care team if you are concerned about school refusal and consider how to support this moving forward. The school and care team may identify if you require additional professional support such as an external education support program, working with the Student Support Group (SSG), having an Education Needs Assessment, changing their Individual Education Plan (IEP), or referring to a service

such as the LOOKOUT program. More information on support programs can be found in **Section 6**.

Do not be afraid to plan and ask for help from your care team. For a successful transition to school, we all must work as a team.

Sometimes it may help to ask direct questions such as:
- Are you being bullied?
- Are you struggling with schoolwork?
- Are you feeling overwhelmed?
- Are you having issues with your teacher?
- Is something else bothering you?

Tips and suggestions
- When speaking to the child or young person, always start with ensuring they feel safe and supported. Reassure them that you want to help them, and that they will not be in trouble.
- Highlight their strengths and what has worked well in the past.
- Consider relaxation techniques such as breathing exercises.
- Create a plan together to manage what their worries might be; ensuring they feel heard, accepted, and included will empower them to move forward.
- Maintain boundaries in the home such as reduced screen time so that disengaging in school is less appealing (ex: no video games during school hours).
- Self-care! School refusal is highly complex and tricky. Ensure you are nourishing yourself and getting the help you need from your network of support.

Further resources
Be You - a collaborative initiative to support the mental health of children and young people in educational settings. It has resources available for caregivers and educators which also includes specific COVID-19 information.
https://beyou.edu.au/
https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/development

Headspace have a wonderful resource on Understanding School Refusal:
https://headspace.org.au/friends-and-family/understanding-school-refusal/

The Conversation shared an article on how to speak to children about school refusal:
https://theconversation.com/so-your-child-refuses-to-go-to-school-heres-how-to-respond-98935

6. Additional supports for children and young people, and carers

In addition to the supports above, a range of resources are available to support children and young people with complex needs throughout this time.

Learning support for students in OOHC
The OOHC Education Commitment: Partnering Agreement requires schools, child protection practitioners, and case workers to support children at school. This ensures that everyone is working together as a team to support the child or young person's individualised education needs.
This includes appointing a mentor, assigning a student support group, developing an IEP, developing an educational needs analysis, and nominating a designated teacher. For information on the OOHC Education Commitment, please visit this link.
https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/oohcpartneragreement.aspx

The LOOKOUT Education and Support Centres
LOOKOUT centres are designed to boost the capacity of schools, carers, child protection practitioners and OOHC services to improve educational outcomes for children and young people living in OOHC. Carers are encouraged to contact the student's school and ask to speak to the Designated Teacher. The designated teacher has a key role in supporting students in OOHC to make a smooth transition into school.
https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/lookout.aspx

Navigator
The Navigator case management program works to support disengaged young people aged 12-17 to return to education and learning. If the child or young person in your care has attended less than 30% of their previous school term, they may be eligible for this program if it is in their area. For more information on the Navigator program, please visit:
https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/behaviour/engagement/Pages/navigator.aspx

Learning support for students with complex needs

For more information about how you can support learning at home for children with a disability or additional needs visit https://www.education.vic.gov.au/parents/learning/Pages/home-learning-supporting-child.aspx.

For information on understanding learning difficulties please visit: https://uldforparents.com/

In addition to information on intervention programs, the guide also provides a list of recommended apps for children and young people with learning difficulties: https://uldforparents.com/further-reading/appendix-5-recommended-apps-list/

Disability support

There is additional funding available to support Victorians and their families who have a disability during COVID-19. You can find information about extra supports for Victorians with a disability here. https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/information-community-services-coronavirus-disease-covid-19

The NDIA has also made changes to better support participants and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic. The two most important changes are:

- NDIS plans can be extended for up to 24 months so there is no need for a plan review
- There is now more flexibility with how the Core Supports and Capacity Building budgets within plans are used. If required, funds can be moved from Capacity Building to Core Support budgets to allow for the purchase of additional day-to-day supports such as a support worker to assist your child to achieve their goals. This needs to be undertaken in consultation with one of the new NDIA special planners.

Special teams of planners in the NDIA are available to help make urgent changes to plans. Call your Support Coordinator or call the NDIA on 1800 800 110 if you are concerned that your child, or a child in your care, has support needs that are not being met.

The NDIS is providing more flexibility to use existing NDIS funding to purchase assistive technology items such as electronic devices, data plans and fitness equipment, see more here: https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/home-equipment-and-supports/assistive-technology-explained

Information about the use of plan funding and arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic is also available here: https://www.ndis.gov.au/coronavirus/participants-coronavirus-covid-19

A national disability information helpline has been established to provide information and referrals for people with a disability who need help because of COVID-19. The free number is 1800 643 787.

The NDIS Commission website provides information for NDIS participants about what they can expect from the NDIS. Also found at:
https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/participants/covid-19-people-disability
There are some organisations that advocate for the needs of children and young people with a disability and more information about COVID-19 related supports can be found on their websites. These include:

- Association for Children with a Disability: https://www.acd.org.au/
- Youth Disability Advocacy Service: https://www.yacvic.org.au/ydas
- Amaze: https://www.amaze.org.au/

Support for carers of children and young people with a disability

The *Victorian Support for Carers Program* provides respite, other services and supports for Victorian carers who are caring for someone with care needs such as a mental illness, chronic illness, disability (including young carers – under 25 years). It provides one-off or short-term supports for carers including, goods and equipment, that can add to other services or fill service gaps. Carers may be eligible for Support for Carer Program supports and services even if they are eligible for or accessing other services and programs such as NDIS. To find your local Support for Carers Program provider, phone Carers Victoria Advisory Line on 1800 514 845 or visit their website:
https://www.carersvictoria.org.au/

The **Commonwealth Carer Gateway** provides a wide range of help – from counselling and peer support groups to respite care, home help and equipment for carers looking after someone with a disability, medical condition, mental illness or who is frail due to age. You do not need to be a new carer to use Carer Gateway services – carers can use the services at any time in their caring journey. Many of the services are online or can be provided over the phone. Carer Gateway services do not affect services delivered through NDIS, or any state or territory carer services or carer payments you may be receiving.

From April 2020, carers can call one number (1800 422 737) to be linked to a wide range of services. Carer Gateway staff will help you to arrange these services.

Extra support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
Families and carers of Aboriginal students who have any concerns about students learning from home should contact their local Koorie Education Coordinator through the DET office in their area.
https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/Pages/regions.aspx

The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI) can also be contacted on (03) 9481 0800 or for Koorie education information and community updates, visit the VAEAI website below. VAEAI will link Aboriginal community members with any concerns about students learning from home with their Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (LAECG). LAECGs work with the DET's Koorie Education Workforce and schools to ensure Aboriginal students are receiving good quality education.
https://www.vaeai.org.au/

Extra support for children in care turning 18 in 2020
Young people in care turning 18 years old before December 2020 can remain with their kinship or foster carer. Alternatively, young people turning 18 can move to independent living arrangements with an allowance to cover the costs of housing.

Case work support will be provided to these young people and their carers during this period.

Extra support to reduce stress on vulnerable families
Family Services and Family Violence Agencies will receive additional capacity during COVID-19 to provide:
- practical financial support to families, such as access to material aid and communication devices
- assistance to families to participate and connect with universal services including immunisation, childcare, kinder and school
- coaching for families on practical coping strategies, communication and parenting skills needed for 'stay at home' restrictions.

For additional information about support for families please go to: https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/information-community-services-coronavirus-disease-covid-19

THANK YOU

Thank you for your continued commitment to the children and young people of Victoria.

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