

A Space to reflect on ... Ending the school year



HANDOUT FOR PARENTS/CARERS

Introduction

Every child will have their own reaction to the end of the school year. Usually, children are excited about the summer break and eagerly look forward to it. However, underneath the good feelings can be some worries. For instance, they may be sorry to be leaving their class teacher and wondering what next year's teacher will be like. Children can also feel settled by everyday school routines. Without this structure, they may find themselves a little adrift over the holiday period. Of course, family life offers children other experiences and this can help balance the picture. Each child is an individual and will be more or less impacted by the many goodbyes that feature at the end of any school year.

Differences this year

As we know, this year has been a most unusual one. The national lockdown led to school closures so children have missed out on what they've been used to. School is about more than academic learning. It is a place where relationships are tried out with new adults such as with teachers and TAs. Important social skills are learned. For example, forming peer groups or close friendships often includes learning to repair relationships when things go wrong while managing jealous feelings and moments of competition.

The lockdown has meant that children have missed out on these day to day experiences. They've also been exposed to some of the anxieties and concerns that we, as adults, generally try to protect them from. Some children may have been worried about family members falling ill and perhaps dying from the coronavirus. Others will have missed their teacher and found it harder to do their school work without the teacher's encouragement.

Home is generally experienced as separate from school. However, over the last few months, children have been expected to do their class work at home. The majority - if not all - parents/carers have found it is not possible to maintain the structure of the school day at home. Perhaps every day has followed a slightly different routine or some days have been easier to manage than others. Whatever 'school and home life' used to look like has been very different in recent months.

Ending the year

Every ending is always a milestone for us, regardless of our age. Children experience the end of each school year as a particular marker on their life journey. This year, the familiar routines defining the ending will have been difficult to keep in place. For instance, there would usually be whole class assemblies with performances or singing and perhaps achievement certificates given out. Class parties often feature as well. The ending of each school year is a moment in time to mark for parents/carers and teachers as well. As adults, we always enjoy seeing young children gathered together for their final assembly. Regardless of the inevitable ups and downs of the year just gone, bringing everyone together to celebrate an ending is a heart warming moment. This year, although some pupils have been welcomed back on to the school site, the vast majority are still at home.

Different experiences of endings

Life experiences can make endings more challenging for some children than for others. Perhaps they've moved school more than once and are worried about what September will bring. They may wonder if they will be facing another school move and experience being 'the new pupil' all over again. Or maybe a child's parents/ carers have recently separated, possibly with a new step parent moving in. This may cause a child to feel tearful saying goodbye to their class teacher and imagining a new teacher in September taking their place. Such changes may cause some children to feel more tearful than others when saying goodbye to their class teachers and while imagining new teachers arriving in September to take their place. As is clear from these two short examples, some children will have a more emotional response to the end of year goodbyes than others. It can be helpful for adults around the child to be mindful of this and give them time to talk about how they are feeling.

Managing the summer break

The summer break will feel different this year as the majority of children have already spent time at home when normally they would have been in school. Even if they have gone into school, it will not have been the same. This means that summer could feel like a continuation of life under lockdown especially as going away may not be an option. Talking to children about this and trying to make summer feel like a break is important. Children need a chance to have time away from their school work and opportunities for free play.

The value of play and why it is important

Children's play is a serious business and is an essential part of all children's development and learning. Free imaginative play is vital for normal social and emotional development and for learning. Structured activities in school and at home - while of value - need to be balanced with time for free imaginative play. Playing football and computer games are play of a kind, but they rely on rules and structures. Free play is unique - it develops the imagination and enables children to think creatively. Unstructured, or free play, is pleasurable and relaxing and encourages initiative and curiosity. It nurtures creativity, for example, through problem solving and making up 'stories'.

Playing with others:

*Helps children to learn social norms such as turn taking, managing social contacts and making space for others. The child who has had a rich experience of social play is likely to be more able to develop socially and to deal with unpredictable situations in later life.

*Develops persistence and the ability to negotiate

* Language and communication skills improve – keeping everybody happy and engaged is a prerequisite for playing together!

*Children learn to manage healthy aggression and assertiveness in a safe context

*Children can rehearse difficult situations and potential conflicts; *for example, the child who takes his dinosaur to the doctor over and over again until he is satisfied that the dinosaur is better is learning to manage his anxiety through repetitive play*

*Trying out different roles gives children some experience of what it might be like to be the other person

*Play enables children to discover what they know and what they feel and also what others know and feel. Adults work out how they feel by talking things through- children 'play things through'. Children come to organize their life experience through free, imaginative play.

Play is rich and creative. It is vital for emotional health. Through play, children of all ages and abilities can engage in fantasies and stories that enable them to manage anxiety, solve problems and rehearse overcoming difficulties. Curiosity, imagination and creativity are nurtured. Research shows evidence that children who engage in imaginative free play are more likely to succeed throughout school and in later life. The long summer holiday is a perfect time for your child to enjoy play of this kind.

Everyone needs a break!

Of course, parents/ carers need time off too. The recent lockdown may have provided opportunities for quality time with family but everyone will have had ups and downs during this recent period. We've not been through a similar experience before and it can take its toll. Parents/carers needn't feel guilty if they want to have some time away from children. Grandparents, friends and neighbours can support each other by taking turns looking after children. Summer should be a time for everyone to relax. Hopefully, you and your family will enjoy the holiday. Come September, school staff will be on hand to give your child a very warm welcome. It is always a pleasure to re-connect with pupils after a long break. (Information on ways of accessing advice & support follows on the next page.)

ADVICE and SUPPORT FOR PARENTS/CARERS

Being a parent or carer is a very important role but we all know how challenging it can be! It can be reassuring to know that there is confidential help and advice available. Check out the websites below for advice and information. Some offer helplines too.

Counselling and support on any issues

www.samaritans.org.uk This confidential counselling service is available via email or on the phone. The Samaritans can help you with any type of problem you are experiencing. Ring **Freephone 08457 90 90 90**

Help and advice re: family/ parenting issues

www.familylives.org.uk Visit the website or ring **Freephone Parentline** on 0808 800 2222

www.relate.org.uk/relationship-help/help-family-life-and-parenting

Free online relationship advice for you and your family and help with family life and parenting issues more generally.

www.youngminds.org.uk Visit the Young Minds website and click on find help - parents for information and advice or call **Freephone 0800 802 5544** parents' helpline to discuss any worries about your child's emotional well being

www.familiestogetherlondon.com Information and support for the parents of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people

www.parentlineplus.org.uk provides advice on any parenting issue 0808 800 2222

www.womensaid.org.uk 0808 2000 247 Free phone 24 hr National Domestic Violence Helpline

www.drinkaware.co.uk help with problem drinking

www.kidscape.org.uk beat bullying website for parents

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/> Support for dealing with death and grief Day time helpline 0844 477 9400 Email helpline@cruse.org.uk

www.separatedfamilies.info works with everyone affected by family separation in order to bring about better outcomes for children

www.parentsintouch.co.uk Education and information site

Information on CHILDLINE- Help and Support for Children at any Time

Holidays can be a difficult time of year. There is a common assumption that breaks are going to be enjoyable but for most of us, they are a mixed experience. For example, family life can be complex and over a holiday period, issues may come up which lead to tension or conflicts. Or perhaps it is a lonely time and isolation is a problem. It may be that academic pressure is in the background causing worries. These are just some examples of what can make holidays very challenging for children and families.

Help is never far away - children and young people can visit the **Childline** website or phone them at any time. Children can speak confidentially at anytime to an understanding adult trained to help. They can call **Freephone 0800 1111**.

Do encourage your child to ring Childline. Even children who feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings with their family may have times when they welcome speaking to someone outside the home who is trained to listen and understand.

Commonly asked questions are answered below:

- **Is ChildLine's confidentiality different from school?**

Yes, ChildLine's confidentiality is different from school. There are a lot of things that your teacher couldn't keep confidential that ChildLine can. That means you can feel safe to talk about anything you need to.

Some children and young people tell us that their teacher suggested that they call ChildLine because of this.

- **Do I have to tell Childline my name?**

You can tell Childline as much or as little as you want to. Sometimes a ChildLine counsellor will ask you if you want to give a first name, but it's up to you if you want to do this. You can always make up a name if you don't want to give Childline your real name. Childline asks you to use the same name if you do get in touch with them again so that Childline will know it's you. When you go online, you will be asked to choose a username and a nickname, and it's up to you what you decide to call yourself. It's important that you don't let anyone else know what you've chosen to call yourself. If you want Childline to get in touch with someone to let them know about what is happening to you, we will need to know your full name and some other information about you.

- **What happens if I do tell Childline my name?**

Just because Childline does know your name doesn't mean that they would tell someone else about what is happening for you, even if Childline knows your full name. You can feel safe to tell Childline as much as you want. If you think you might like to phone Childline back, sometimes it can be helpful if you tell Childline your first name (or the name you want us to call you) so that it is easier for Childline to find notes about what you've said in your calls.

- **What happens if I want ChildLine to tell someone about what's happening to me?**

If you want someone else to know about what is happening to you, you can talk to your ChildLine counsellor about what you would like to do next, and who else you want to know about your situation. Childline would need to know some more information about you, like your full name and address, your date of birth and the name of your school. If you need time to think about whether or not you want us to tell someone else, just let us know. You can always get in touch with ChildLine again later.

- **Do Childline know my phone number or email address?**

No, Childline won't know this information unless you choose to tell them. If you want Childline to talk to someone else about what is happening, like the police or social services, Childline will probably ask you to give them your phone number so they can contact you.

There may be times when Childline is very worried about your safety or someone else's safety and they will need to tell someone about what is happening. If this is the case, there is a way that Childline can request your phone number or IP address (a number unique to your computer) which means that they can get help to you. Childline has strict guidelines about when they can do this and they would always try and talk to you first, before they pass this information on to an outside agency.

- **Will my call to ChildLine be on the phone bill, and can I call free on my mobile?**

Because ChildLine is an 0800 number, calls are free and don't show up on a BT or cable phone bill. Calls to ChildLine on 0800 1111 are currently free from all the existing networks - 3, BT Mobile, Fresh, O2, Orange, T Mobile, Virgin, Vodafone. Childline has been told that calls will not appear on any of these bills. The telephone number will still appear in your list of dialled calls on your mobile as a 0800 11 11. If you don't want people to see the number in your list of dialled calls, you should delete this from your called number list.

- **Can anyone see that I've used my home computer to get in touch with ChildLine?**

No one will be able to read any messages you've sent to ChildLine or received from a ChildLine counsellor as long as you keep your password private. It is possible for someone to see the history of the sites you have visited on your computer, but not if you have deleted your history. If you want to delete this history see 'Cover Your Tracks' for advice about how to do this.

- **Who at ChildLine knows what I've talked about?**

Your contact with ChildLine is confidential between you and ChildLine.