

# Supporting mental health in the RETURN to school



***Tips for parents and carers by Bridge the Gap***

[www.jwbridgethegap.com](http://www.jwbridgethegap.com)



# validate emotions



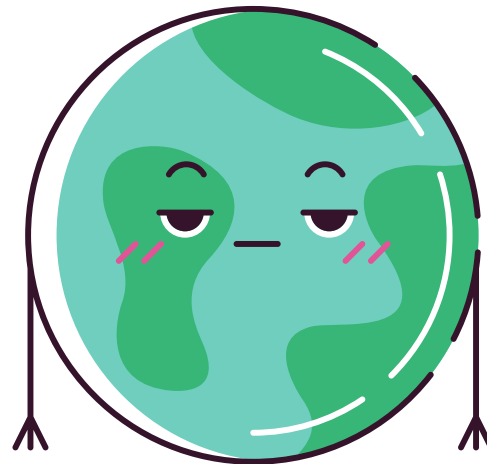
Refrain from using it 'fix it' statements. Try using phrases such as 'I get it', or I'm so glad you told me how you felt'. Problem solving comes after validation.

# Empathise



*Empathise with how they feel and allow them the space to feel it and move through it.*

Don't assume you know how  
your child feels



Emotions are complex, try and hold a safe space for  
them to process them, without hijacking the process.

Give children Advance Notice  
of the date they'll be in  
school



*Prepare them in advance so you have time to talk  
through worries and create coping strategies together.*

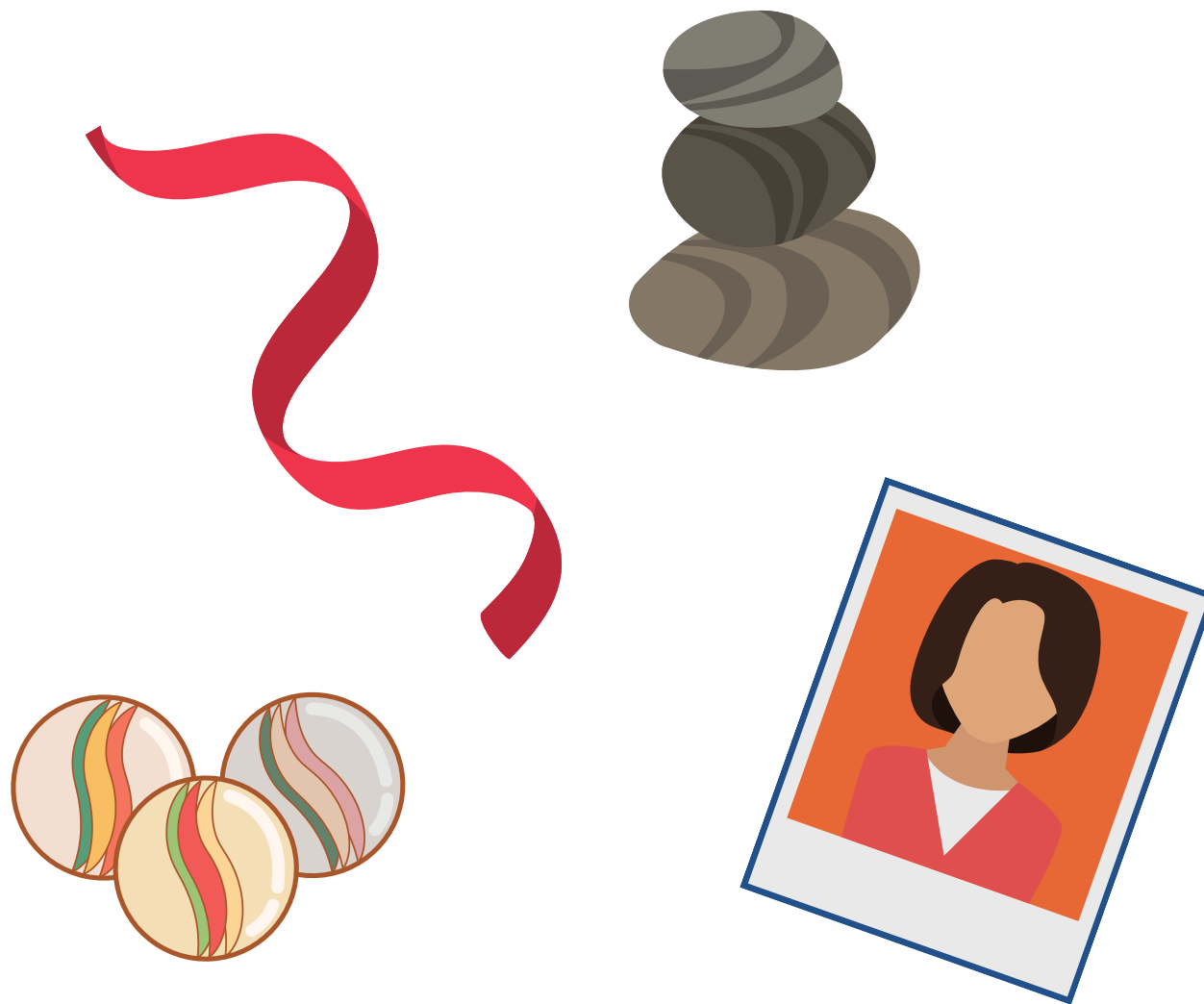
Look at pictures of teachers,  
classrooms and friends at  
school



*Look through photos and spend some time visiting the school website so they can remind themselves of what to expect. Keep an eye out for your schools updates.*



Gather a soothing item for  
them to have in their pocket  
or bag



*Give them a third place to go to when things feel a little  
overwhelming.*



ARRANGE to meet a friend  
at the gates OR to walk  
in with



*Arrange to meet a friend outside school or on the way.  
Help them find their support network again.*





ARRANGE to do something fun  
together



Plan time together, give them something to look  
forward to at the weekend.

Use visual timetables to  
help children know what to  
expect



Print them at home or buy portable ones, giving children visual reminders will help them to know what to expect next.



# Create opportunity for open ended play and creativity



*Play is a child's natural stress reliever, create opportunity for open ended play and creativity. This also gives them an opportunity to express emotions without talking.*



Put aside 10 minutes  
everyday to sit and just  
'be' with your child



*The Power of 10. Put aside 10 minutes a day to just be together without expectation.*

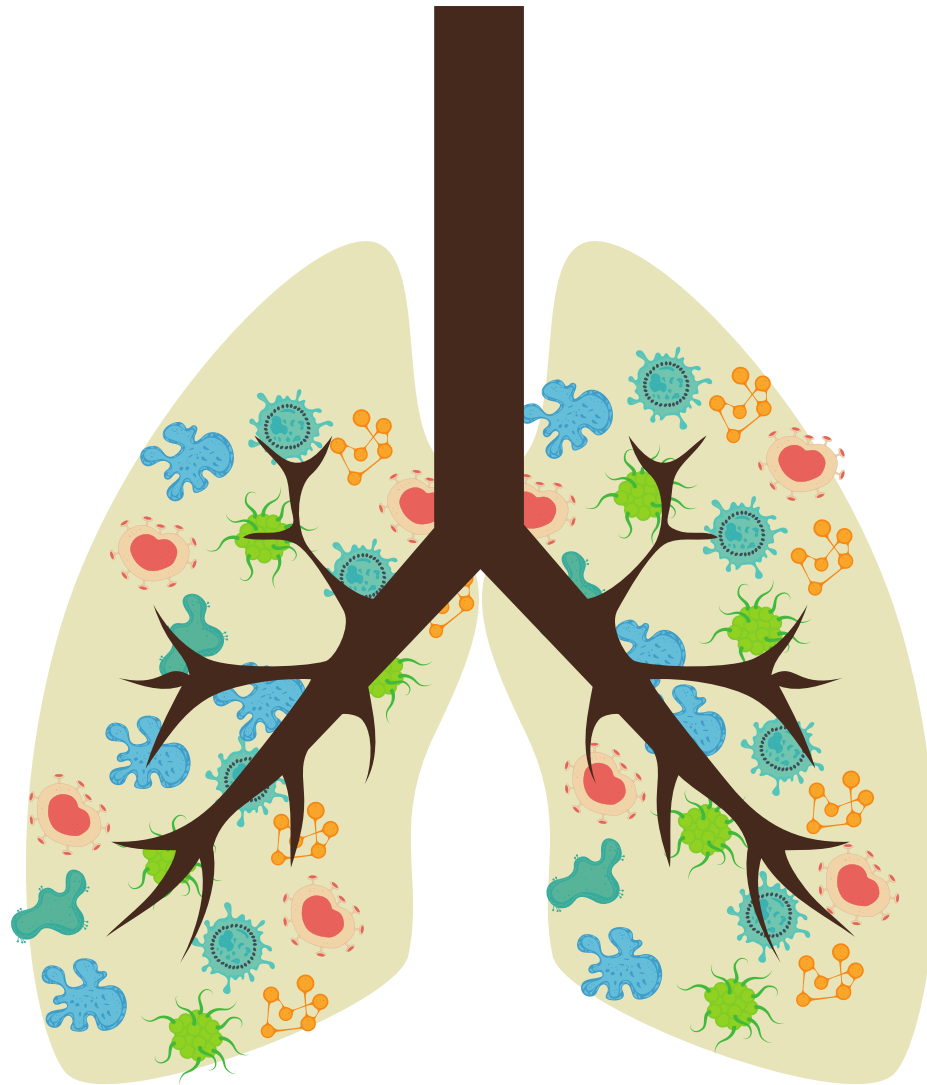


Try a grounding activity,  
like gardening a couple of  
times a week



*Gardening and making playdough can both help children's  
mental health and wellbeing.*

# Teach and model the use of breathing exercises



Try different ones and practice them proactively so they can use them when they are in distress.



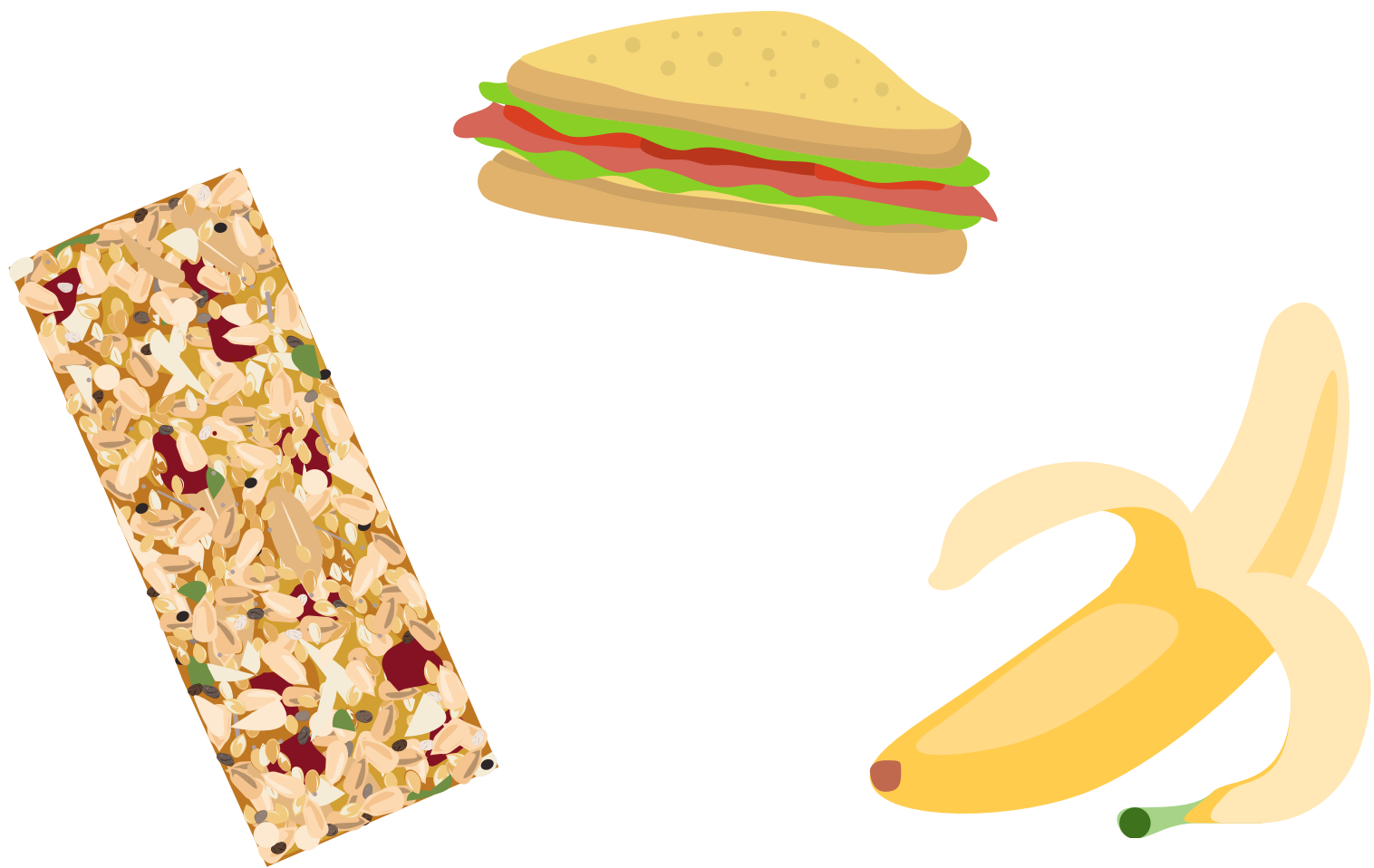
DON'T interrogate them with  
questions, try using  
CONVERSATION starters instead



*Keep questions light and put the focus on "I'm so pleased to see you" rather than "What did you do today?". Try using some conversation starters to help mix things up*



Have SNACKS Ready for  
when you pick them  
up/when they come home



They will have had to go longer than they are used to  
without food and drinks.





Be prepared for post school collapse and ensure they have anytime they might need to switch off after school



Ask them what quiet activity they would like to do when they come home and have it ready for them - this is a good time for screen time.



Keep realistic expectations  
in place



*Keep developmentally realistic expectations, try and  
take the situation as it comes.*



Trust your gut, if you  
are concerned about your  
child, please find support



*If you become concerned about how your child is coping  
with the transition back, trust your gut and ask for help.*



# Find Us...

***Free resources and support information leaflets for both children and adults available on our website, both full of useful links to other resources and organisations.***



[jwbridgethegap.com](http://jwbridgethegap.com)



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