



Going Back to School in the World of COVID-19: Tips for Special Needs Children

School is going to be different this fall, and for special needs students, it may be tough for them to adapt to the new guidelines. It is important to help prepare your children before they go back to the classroom.

So how do you do that? ABA Behavioral Specialists put together a couple of tips to help you and your kids get ready for a great school year!

Back-to-School Tip #1:

Practice!

Practice makes perfect! You will need to go over, repeatedly, all of the new requirements your children will face this school year to ensure they are comfortable with them and understand why they are important.

What to Practice:

1. *Taking their temperature. For in-person classes, this will be a requirement. Start now! Take your child's temperature before you leave the house – every time.*
2. *Wearing a mask. Your child will likely be required to wear a mask in school and all public places. Teach them how to put it on and take it off and why they must wear it.*
3. *Washing their hands/hand sanitizing. Make sure you do this between every activity and always explain why you are doing it.*
4. *Social distancing and appropriate ways to greet their friends. Make sure you give positive examples; don't just tell them what they can't do. Say, "Wave hello to your friends instead of giving a high five or a hug."*

Back-to-School Tip #2:

Reward!

For everything they successfully practice, give your child a highly desired reward.

1. *Use first/then language. "First you take your temperature, then we can go to the park."*
2. *Break each task down as much as needed. For some children, they won't be able to tolerate a mask for more than a few seconds. That is OK. As long as they wear the mask properly for 1-5 seconds (whatever goal you decide on ahead of time) without touching it, they earn their reward. Keep practicing and increasing the time as your child allows.*

Back-to-School Tip #3:

Social Stories

Social stories™, created by Dr. Carol Gray in 1991, are short narratives of a particular situation, in this case going back to school in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, that help special needs children understand what to expect in that situation and why. The stories are adapted per each child's needs and help give them a concrete understanding of the situation they will face. They are told in words/descriptions the child can understand often using first-person or familiar people. Examples can be found online or developed by your child's therapist.

Back-to-School Tip #4:

Video Modeling

Video modeling is a great way to showcase a desired behavior. By showing your child a video of other children in school wearing masks or of people washing their hands for 20 seconds, they may be more likely to adopt the behavior.

Back-to-School Tip #5:

Repetitively!

One of the best things you can do is talk to your child about what they can expect – and do so often. If you think you've said it enough, say it again! Repetition is important in talking and in practicing.

1. *Make sure your child understands that their teacher/therapists will be wearing facial coverings.*
2. *Talk to them about social distancing and why they cannot physically interact with friends/teachers.*
3. *Discuss the important of hygiene, such as washing/sanitizing hands, not touching their face, not fidgeting with their facial covering, not putting their fingers in their mouth, etc.*

We give you these tips not to scare you but to prepare you! Be diligent in your preparation, but most importantly, make it fun!

If you find your child is still struggling, reach out to a specialist. Our team at ABA Behavior Specialists is here to help! We want your children to succeed and not be scared to attend school this fall.

[Contact ABA Behavioral Specialists to learn more!](#)