

Going back to school or college as lockdown eases when you have an underlying health condition: information for children and young people

You've probably been worried about the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic – your exams and classes have been cancelled, you might be missing your friends or doing a lot more around the house or looking after other members of the family. As lockdown eases for some of us, your worries may still be there but about different things, especially going back to school or college. The Patient Experience team and the Young People's Forum (YPF) have put together this information sheet with lots of hints and tips for how to manage your worries and where to go for help if anything is bothering you.

Don't focus on what you can't change

It may seem like lots of people are (and have been) breaking lockdown rules but it won't help to worry about what other people are doing. If you think their actions are putting you at risk, keep out of their way and keep following the good hygiene precautions like regular handwashing and keeping at least two metres away from them.

Keep the lines of communication open

When everyone is under stress, it's important to open up about how you're feeling. This is especially true if things have been strained during lockdown.

Talk to someone about how you're coping now the situation is changing. If you don't feel happy talking to your parents about stuff, find another relative or grown up to talk to about what's bothering you.

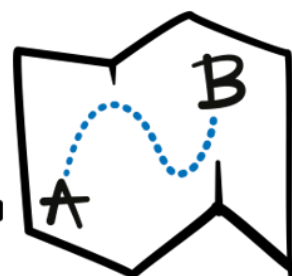
If you prefer not to talk face-to-face, look at the email and text messaging support services at the end of this information sheet. Maybe you find it easier to draw or paint what you're feeling – whatever way you choose, the important things are to be honest and open.

Limit news and social media

You may have tried to ignore the news and social media during lockdown or been glued to it for hours, but now could be a good time to set yourself limits for how long you spend viewing it each day.



Perhaps pick two or three times during the day to look at the news or social media and turn off notifications and put down your mobile phone outside these times.



Going out and about

Now that lockdown is easing, it's tempting to meet everyone you've missed and do everything you can, but remember there are still rules to follow.

If you're a bit worried about going outside, think about particular aspects that concern you, then what you could do to get around them – for instance, not going to crowded shopping centres, travelling outside of rush hour or making sure you know which toilets are open.



Understand the impact of your condition

If you have an underlying health condition, you may still be shielding or having to follow other rules, like self-isolating before you go to hospital. Have a look at the specialty guidance on our website at www.gosh.nhs.uk/news/coronavirus-covid-19-information-hub/covid-19-specialty-information-sheets for details of what the changing situation means for you. If you have any questions, get in touch with your clinical team.

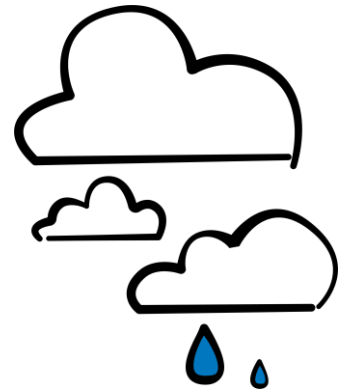
Getting ready to go back to school or college

Some age groups have already gone back to school, but you might still be at home. Keep in touch with school to find out what the plan is for bringing everyone back safely – check their website or give them a ring.

It can be difficult to keep studying or revising when exams have been cancelled or postponed but it's important to keep your mind active. Learning new things helps keep us occupied – have a look at online videos about topics of interest or maybe visit some galleries and museums virtually.

Don't think you've wasted lockdown

Lots of people started lockdown with a long list of things they were going to do or learn while they had the chance. For instance, sorting out wardrobes, learning a new language or skill, meditation or reading.



Don't worry if everyday life got in the way of your plans – it can be hard to turn your mind to other things if you are worried. Have a look at your list again and review it to see what you still want to do and adjust your plans accordingly.

Remember the good stuff

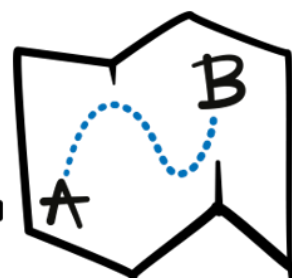
Although lockdown has been difficult for everyone, some good things have come out of it. Many of us now talk to our neighbours when we see them or help out if someone needs it, and spend lots more time with our families.

Try to remember the good stuff that happened during lockdown – there are lots of things we have learned that we should continue in the future. If you have found family activities that you all enjoy, there is no reason to stop them now.

For instance, a lot of people have connected to nature during lockdown, watching birds outside the window and listening to their birdsong.



Try to schedule some time each week to carry on with these activities as 'family time' when work and other stresses are put to one side.



We can't get everything right

Sometimes, it can be important to make mistakes and learn from them. Have a look back at what you've learned during lockdown and where you could have done things better, then perhaps think about how you could make changes in the future.

Understand what school will be like

Teachers and other school staff have been working hard to make classrooms as safe as possible for you when you go back. Have a look at the school website to see what they've been doing.

The rules about when and where to wear a mask keep changing, but it's sensible to carry one with you just in case. Secondary schools currently expect pupils to wear masks, certainly in communal areas such as corridors, but this may change when most of the schools go back.

As with everything, the key to preventing spread is good hygiene – wash your hands or use hand sanitiser regularly and keep at least 2m away from other people.

Planning for the future

It can be difficult to look too far ahead and make plans as the situation is ever-changing, but it is important to think about the future even if plans aren't yet concrete.

Perhaps start by making a list of what you've enjoyed during lockdown and try to find ways to carry on doing them.

Think about what you'd like to do when you leave school or college – are there ways you can find out more about your options online or could you do some free online training to expand your skill base.

Be kind to yourself

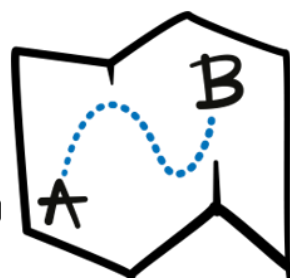
If you've been worried during lockdown, you might not have been looking after yourself as well as you usually would. Many people have found they have been eating different or more food during lockdown or their sleep has been disturbed.

Try to find ways to slowly improve your health and wellbeing – lots of people have discovered running through the Couch to 5K app, tried meditation, mindfulness or yoga.



Ask for help

If you are worried you're not coping too well, open up and ask for help. There are lots of people at GOSH who can help, as well as other organisations nearer to home. Remember, the first step is to admit things are not great but it's important to then do something about it.



People who can help

At GOSH, **psychosocial teams** are groups of highly trained professionals, including social workers, family support workers, family therapy and clinical psychologists, with expertise in caring for children, young people and families in hospital. All wards and departments can get in touch with the psychosocial service.

The **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (Pals)** team can give you confidential advice and support about any issues that crop up while you're visiting or staying at GOSH. Drop into the office in main reception, call them on 020 7829 7862 or email pals@gosh.nhs.uk.

The **Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care** team offer spiritual, religious and pastoral care to staff, families, and children of all faiths or none. They visit the wards regularly and also provide a 24-hour on-call service every day of the year. Visit the Chaplaincy Office by St Christopher's Chapel, ask a member of the ward team to contact them or email Chaplaincy@gosh.nhs.uk.

The **Children's Hospital School** can offer support and advice about any education issues, including resources for activities at home. Have a look at their webpages at www.gosh.nhs.uk/your-hospital-visit/hospital-facilities-and-services/welcome-childrens-hospital-school.

Support organisations for specific conditions can be very helpful and the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (Pals) at GOSH can put you in touch with a relevant organisation. The umbrella organisation Contact (previously called Contact a Family) produces helpful information sheets. You can telephone them on 0808 808 3555 or visit their website at www.contact.org.uk.

Sibs is a UK organisation especially for children, young people and adults with a brother or sister who is ill or has additional needs. As well as information, they hold regular family days so your other children can meet others in a similar situation. Visit their website at www.sibs.org.uk for further details.

The **Samaritans** offer emotional support to anyone in distress. Call their helpline on 116 123 (you don't need a dialling code), email Jo@samaritans.org or visit their website at www.samaritans.org.

Adviceguide is the online Citizen's Advice Bureau service that gives you information on a wide range of topics, including benefits and employment, and debt and legal issues. Visit their website at www.adviceguide.org.uk.

