

Checklist 1

For Carers: Preparing for the return to school

Before school starts

- Talk about school in small, manageable conversations, not long lectures
- Walk or drive past the school together if possible
- Re-establish daily routines (wake-up, meals, bedtime) 1–2 weeks before school
- Prepare uniforms, bags, and lunches together to increase predictability and control
- Let the child choose what they can (backpack, drink bottle, lunch items)
- Notice and name feelings: “A lot of kids feel nervous about school starting again.”

Emotionally

- Expect mixed emotions: excitement, fear, grief, anger, shutdown
- Reassure the child that struggling is allowed
- Avoid statements like “You’ll be fine”, instead say “We’ll work it out together.”
- Share the plan for pick-up times and who will be there practically
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- Reduce extra commitments during the first few weeks
- Plan calming activities after school (walks, drawing, quiet time)
- Ensure therapy and support appointments are factored into routines

Checklist 2

For Carers: The first weeks back at school

Before school starts

- Prioritise connection over correction at home
- Expect fatigue, irritability, or emotional meltdowns after school
- Keep expectations low and predictable
- Celebrate effort (getting dressed, going through the gate, staying for part of the day)
- Use reflective statements rather than consequences: "Today was really hard on your body."
- Monitor sleep, appetite, and emotional regulation
- Communicate early with the school if concerns arise

Red flags to watch for

- School refusal or escalating distress
- Regression (bedwetting, clinginess, emotional outbursts)
- Withdrawal, shutdown, or loss of interest
- Increased aggression or risk-taking

These are
signals for
support, not
punishment.



Checklist 3

For Schools: Creating trauma-responsive transitions

Before term begins

- Identify a key trusted adult for the child
- Review existing care or support plans
- Prepare staff with relevant, respectful information
- Plan gradual or flexible starts where needed
- Ensure consistency in classroom routines

In the classroom

- Provide clear daily schedules (visual where possible)
- Explain changes in advance
- Allow movement, breaks, and sensory regulation
- Use calm, predictable responses to behaviour
- Avoid public correction or shaming

Relational safety

- Greet the child by name
- Notice and comment on strengths
- Check in privately when a child is struggling
- Use language that separates behaviour from identity

Checklist 4

For Educators: Responding to distress and behaviour

When a child is distressed, ask:

- What might this behaviour be communicating?
- Is the child overwhelmed, frightened, or dysregulated?
- How can I reduce demand and increase safety right now?

Helpful responses

- Lower your voice and slow your movements
- Offer choices rather than commands
- Validate feelings before addressing behaviour
- Provide space for regulation without exclusion
- Follow up with repair and reassurance

Avoid

- Power struggles
- Public consequences
- Threats or ultimatums
- Assuming non-compliance is intentional

Checklist 5

For caseworkers, wellbeing staff, and therapists

Before term begins

- Ensure school transitions are included in care planning
- Support information sharing between carers and schools
- Advocate for flexibility around attendance and performance
- Monitor cumulative stress during early term
- Support carers to hold realistic expectations
- Reinforce strengths, not deficits

Checklist 6 For everyone

A trauma-informed mindset

- Behaviour is communication
- Safety comes before learning
- Connection builds regulation
- Progress is not linear
- Consistency matters more than perfection
- Healing happens in relationships



Key question to keep asking:

“What does this child need in order to feel safe enough to learn right now?”

