



Guidelines for Parents and Teachers

“Young Children & COVID: Audrey Duck & Dr. Susan Linn Talk about Going Back to School”

Defending the Early Year’s new video, “Young Children & COVID: Audrey Duck & Dr. Susan Linn Talk about Going Back to School,” (2021) is designed to serve as a springboard for conversations between young children and their parents, teachers, and caregivers about returning to classrooms in the age of COVID.

The lives of young children changed dramatically in March 2020 when COVID 19 forced most schools and day care centers to close. Many young children have been at home ever since, sometimes with video classes or in a hybrid situation with some days in school and some at home. Others have had no contact with school at all. While, in most cases, returning to school is a positive step, it’s a change in children’s lives and they are likely to have many feelings about it. Those feelings may be hard for children to express directly. Watching Susan help Audrey Duck cope with her conflicting feelings about returning to school sets the stage for safe and meaningful discussions about the thoughts and emotions young children are experiencing as they return to school.

We suggest that families watch this seven-and-a-half-minute video before school begins and that teachers watch with their class on their first day back or soon after. Here are some suggestions for facilitating the conversation afterwards:

- **Ask open-ended questions.**
 - ◆ “Audrey is worried about going back to school. She’s been home with Susan for a long time and she’s concerned that her friends might not remember her and about having a new teacher. Have you had any feelings like Audrey?”



- ◆ If a child gives a short reply, such as "I'm scared," you can ask an extending question, such as "So you're feeling scared. Can you tell me more?"
- ◆ Some kids may say that they aren't scared. You can say, "Some kids may be scared and some kids may not be. But whatever you're feeling, it's okay to talk about it."
- **Listen to children.** Try to hear what children are telling you. Be present with them. Rephrase what you hear them say without judging or commenting on it.
 - ◆ If a child says, "I don't want to wear a mask," you could say, "I know. I don't either. But you have to wear one in school to keep you and other people safe."
 - ◆ Assure them that they can come and talk about their feelings – whether happy or sad – at any time, as Susan tells Audrey.
- **Validate and normalize children's feelings.** Let children know that they are not alone in their concerns.
 - ◆ If a child says, "I'm scared," You can repeat "You're scared? You know, I think lots of children are probably feeling that way."
 - ◆ In the video, when Audrey says, "I want you to come to school with me. I'm used to you. Every single day I've been with you." Susan responds, "We have been together a lot in the past year and a half. That's true."
- **Answer questions honestly.**
 - ◆ If you know, for example, that your child must wear a mask or that you will not be allowed to accompany them into the school building, tell them, as Susan informs Audrey.
- **Reassure children.**
 - ◆ "You can do this. You've done it before and you can do it again."
 - ◆ Susan reminds Audrey that her old classroom and teacher were once new, but that she not only got used to them, but she grew to love them.
 - ◆ Let children know that you believe that going back to school is good for them. Children can pick up adults' negative or ambivalent feelings.

As school reopening approaches, we suggest you observe children's behavior. Note changes in eating, sleeping, or toileting, more frequent tears or tantrums, being withdrawn, or acting out. Changes in behavior often indicate a child is worried about something. When Susan notices Audrey jumping up and down from excitement and then drooping, she asks Audrey what's going on.

Young children have been through a lot of significant changes during the COVID pandemic and, for many children, returning to in-person school is yet another change. We hope that sharing this Audrey Duck video with your children or students will spark important conversations that will help make their transition back to school a little easier.

"Young Children & COVID: Audrey Duck & Dr. Susan Linn Talk about Going Back to School" is the fourth in a series of videos that DEY has created to help children cope with challenging issues. Find them at <https://dey.org/videos/>.

