



The word 'hello' is derived from holla or hollo and has been in existence since the mid 1800's. These words were originally used to attract and demand someone's attention. 'Hello' gained widespread usage through increased use of the telephone. Nowadays it is more commonly used as an everyday greeting and often combined with a handshake, hug or fist bump depending on the formality of the meeting and relationship between two people.



As children return to school following lockdown the importance of their first 'hello' is paramount. Some will crave the security of school, happily following new social distancing routines and seeking support from adults they have trusting relationships with. Others will feel uncertain and anxious about returning to an environment which is, in many ways, familiar but also very different. Managing the emotions that go hand in hand with accepting and adapting to change is difficult. Children who experience the world as an unpredictable and, at times, scary place may feel the need to either fight against, run or hide from the 'new normal'.



From the moment they re-enter our schools children need to be made to feel welcome. Greet them by name and reassure them that although things may look a little different and the rules have changed they are very much valued by all the adults in school. Some children may initially refuse to enter the school building and resist the engagement of adults, even those they have positive and trusting relationships with them. It is important to acknowledge and validate feelings, showing empathy and understanding. It is also important to remember that some children, along with the anxiety of returning to school, will be experiencing the loss of a very special time at home with their parents/carers/siblings.

So, getting that first hello right could make all the difference for an anxious child returning to school. Take as much time as the child needs to familiarise themselves with the new routines and expectations, reassuring them that you will be there for them every step of the way. Take a tour of the school and explain what each session of the day will look and feel like. Ensure that children have a least one close friend in their 'bubble' to enable some level of social interaction experience. If different adults are working with new groups of children take time for everyone to get to know each other... play games and have fun. If it takes a week of saying 'hello' to ensure a safe and successful transition back into school for some children, it is worth the time and effort. Trying to correct the potential emotional harm caused by a rushed and ineffective welcome will take more time, and be more traumatic, than implementing an individual plan for a child who needs extra support. It may feel like you take one step forward and two back but don't give up. It is at these times that our vulnerable children need us most.

