

Be Well Comments



About this resource

This Cognita Be Well Comments resource was written by Beth Kerr, Group Wellbeing Director for Cognita. It draws upon the six elements of Cognita's Be Well Charter (see page 4) as well as established research in the area of wellbeing.

It is also informed by the work of leading experts such as Dr Matthew Walker, author of *Why We Sleep*, in his series of videos for Cognita which are available at www.cognita.com/cognita-be-well.

Returning to school after lockdown

While there is relief and excitement about returning to school after the latest lockdown, this may well be laced with a degree of apprehension or even anxiety for some parents and/or children.

Change – even welcome change – can be difficult to manage, and media headlines on the long-term impact of lockdowns on children can add to the concerns that many are feeling.

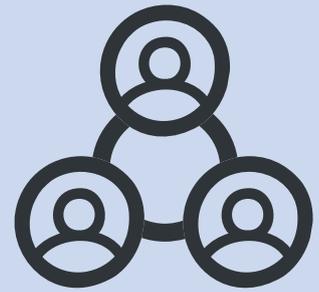
This document, compiled by our Cognita Wellbeing Team is designed to help families as they transition out of lockdown and back to school – which is where children will be able to thrive and flourish.

Our Return to School 3 R's

- 1. Excessive stress prevents children from learning.** Teachers will focus first on ensuring that children feel settled and safe in school, tuning into their emotional and social needs as they are being expressed. Reinforcing this focus at home in discussions about school will feel consistent and reassuring for children in this initial period.
- 2. Good relationships are one of the strongest predictors of a child's wellbeing.** They shape the way a child sees the world and affect all areas of development and learning. Many children, especially younger ones, will need to 're-learn' how to express themselves, socialise and behave appropriately in a different context. So, when restrictions permit, seek every opportunity for your child to interact with friends and family.
- 3. Routines give structure, security and organisation to daily life, minimising chaos and unpredictability.** Therefore, re-establish consistent school routines with your child. Depending on their age, allowing them some autonomy over the structure of their new routine should help them be more accepting of the changes.
- 4. 'When sleep is abundant, minds flourish. When it is deficient, they don't'.** Wise words from the bestselling sleep expert Matthew Walker, as shared in **his video series for Cognita families.**



Restful sleep is the single most effective thing we can encourage to help our children be mentally and physically healthy. So, re-establishing good sleep habits should be a key priority, to help with social, emotional and academic development.



Relationships

Good relationships are a strong predictor of children's wellbeing. When restrictions permit, seek every opportunity for them to interact with friends and family.



Routines

It can take time, but children respond well to consistency. Giving them some autonomy over the structure of their new routine will help them to accept changes.



Rest

Restful sleep is the single most effective thing we can encourage to help our children's wellbeing. Make it a priority now to re-establish good sleep habits.

5. An active lifestyle matters more than ever

now. Many families have been walking more in lockdown, but for some it's been difficult to reach that hour of moderate-to-vigorous-intensity exercise that children aged 6-17 should be doing every day. This is important not only for physical health – research shows that it impacts concentration and learning too, so be intentional about planning physical activity into every day. With older children, this could include helping them be aware of how much they're moving, e.g. by tracking movement on a smartwatch, FitBit etc.

6. Thinking about and giving to others makes more compassionate and grateful communities that will benefit our children.

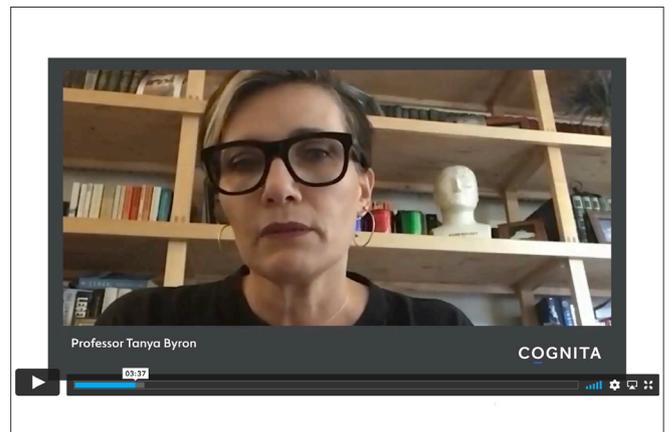
As restrictions ease, explore with them new opportunities to experience the positive impact of giving on their wellbeing.

7. There is strong evidence that practising gratitude can help children to become more mindful and to develop a positive outlook, which leads to happier and more successful young people in the future.

Consciously and actively encourage your child to focus on positive emotions in this way, through talking about them or writing them down. They can focus on the very small things like a sunny day or a video call with a friend, and these should be personal and specific to the child.

8. Talking is one tool we use to communicate, but all behaviour is a form of communication.

Sometimes children find it easier to talk when they are simultaneously engaged in another activity – like cooking or going for a walk. Try to model this by expressing your own feelings, explaining that there are no such things as bad emotions and validating any emotion they may feel.



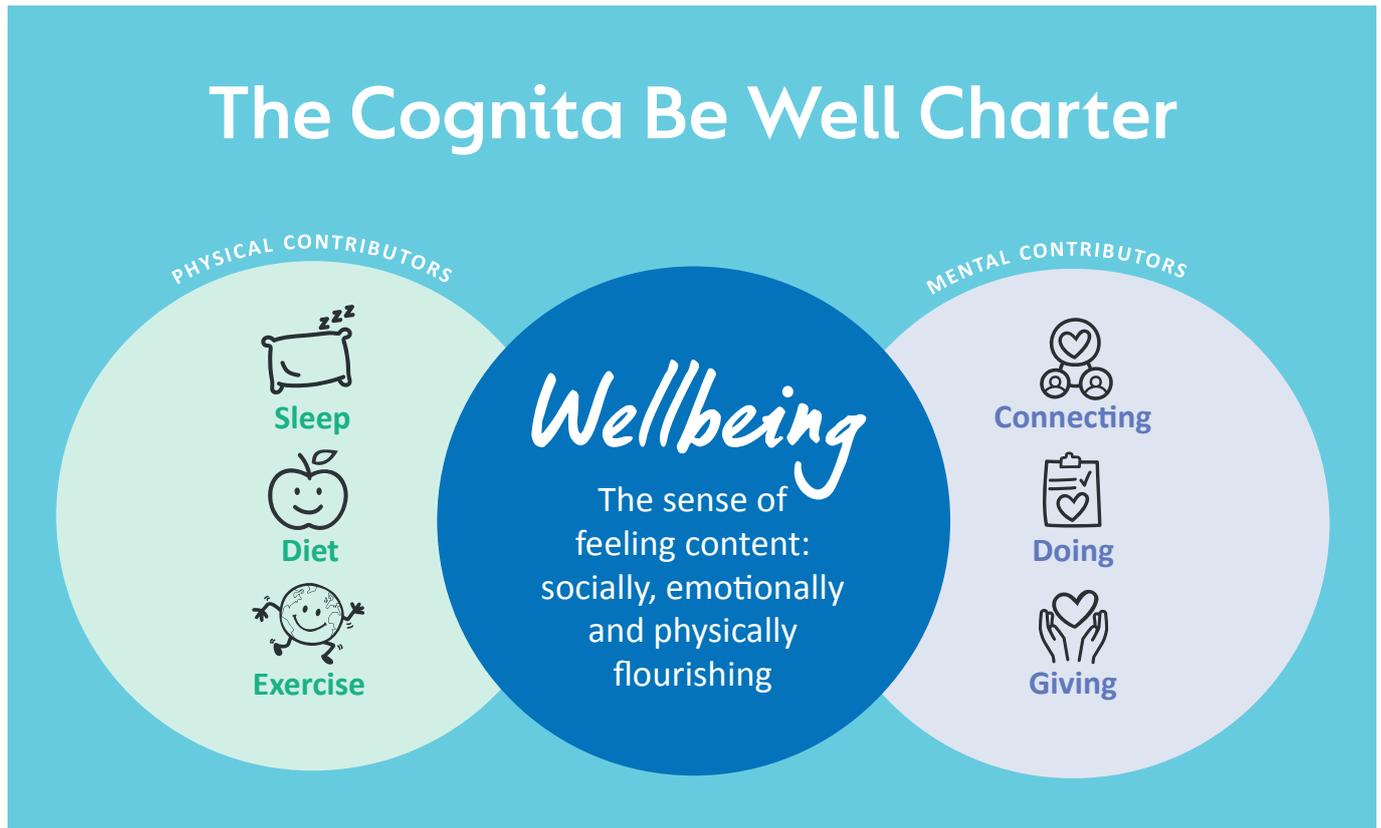
Recorded as many schools were returning after their first lockdown in 2020, this video podcast with Professor Tanya Byron offers insights and tips for parents.



9. There was no parent manual about how to deal with the pandemic, no right or wrong way, and consequently no right or wrong response. Therefore it's important that you reach out to your child's school if you are concerned about them in any way. Schools and families will work as a team to help children readjust and cope with any anxiety they may be feeling.

10. It will take time for us all to move out of lockdown emotionally, so do also look after yourself and be patient. It's key that parents are also self-compassionate in this transition period – looking after others requires that we first look after ourselves.

The Cognita Be Well Charter



Remember, children have had opportunities to develop their independence, creativity and resilience in different ways over the last 12 months. Schools will now harness these skills as they guide your child's education and wellbeing over the coming weeks, months and years.

For more Cognita Be Well resources, visit cognita.com/cognita-be-well.

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