Moving forward in '22 at Berwick Lodge

By Henry Grossek, Principal, Berwick Lodge Primary School

A question I am frequently asked as we move through, what is now the third year of this pandemic is, "how are the children doing?" It is quite a straightforward question, yet in being so, answers are multi-layered.

There's been a lot of media coverage on this question with evidence indicating that some children are doing well, others struggling to varying degrees both academically and mentally. In short, as would be expected, the impact of the pandemic on children has been varied, with predictions of long- term consequences being varied, depending on many factors.

What I've noticed at our school is that the vast majority of children have bounced back well from the moment they have returned to school. Just being at school, interacting with their friends and returning to the familiarity of their school routines has been incredibly therapeutic for them, and by extension school staff.

By the way, that's not to ignore the very real negative impact on some children, both socially and academically. For those children it is vital that schools, ours included, work very closely with their families in rebuilding the educational framework for them. That's most certainly a significant challenge and one in which we cannot afford to fail.

The lesson to be learnt from the positive 'bounce-back' to school by the bulk of students is that as adults, in our role as custodians of children's education and wellbeing, parents and teachers, we can at times underestimate children's capabilities. Children feed off our emotions - that's worth remembering too.

Lessons in sustainability

Sustainability is a focus of many schools these days, with students often encouraged to engage in practices such as packing 'nude' lunches, recycling and switching off lights when not in use.

How can parents help encourage their kids to be sustainable students?

Here are eight tips from Sustainability Victoria:

1. Lunches - get the kids to make their own lunch and use containers suited to nude food, eliminating the need for disposable wrapping. If you do need to wrap, reusable beeswax wraps can be used. Find out about them online or do a course on making them at your local neighborhood house or community arts centre.
2. Make your own snacks - despite what they say, many kids have plenty of time on their hands. Teach them to make their own muesli bars and other snacks. Be patient, it's a great life skill. They will learn to be more independent and have fun doing it!
3. Get more value - use the 'Love Food Hate Waste' website to get great recipes to use last night's leftovers in exciting ways for school (and work) lunches.
4. Use what you've got - save money by digging out pens, pencils and other consumables from drawers, cupboards and bags, rather than buying new ones. Many stationery makers also have a range of notebooks made from recycled paper.
5. Textbooks and uniforms - most schools have secondhand book and uniform shops, but your local op shop is also worth trying. Many high school English and literature books are available for free on Kindle. For other subjects, ask teachers what the difference is with this year's version of a textbook compared with last year's, as the older edition may still be suitable.
6. Walking or riding to school is a great way to stay fit. It saves fuel and reduces vehicle pollution and traffic jams at the school gate. Otherwise, park a short distance from the school and walk with the kids and use it as an opportunity to teach road rules. Catching the bus may also be an option.
7. Buying a desk, bookcase or filing cabinet? Second-hand office furniture shops often have very modern goods at a much better price than new and they will last. It is also worth checking out Facebook Marketplace for some great quality bargains.
8. Ask your school to join the ResourceSmart Schools program offered by Sustainability Victoria. Supporting schools within the state to embed sustainability measures across the school facilities, community and curriculum, once a school joins the program, it will have access to an online portal to learn and practice ways of integrating sustainability while also saving resources and money for the school.

Teaching your kids about sustainability and the environment will have a positive impact on the environment and their future. Picture: ISTOCK

For more information and ways to have a positive impact on the environment, visit www.sustainability.vic.gov.au.

How to keep your kids safe from dangerous poisons

Have you ever noticed that toddlers love to place everything that they find in their mouths, no matter what the object is or how hygienic it may beThis behaviour can start anywhere from as early as 2 months of age and is your little one's way of exploring and learning about the environment around them.

Aside from the inconvenience of every item in your home being covered in drool, this natural curiosity and eagerness to explore can also lead them into danger, particularly if they come into contact with poisonous substances.

How common is childhood poisoning?

Every year in Australia over 1,800 children aged 0-14 years are admitted to hospital due to unintentional poisoning – that's around 34 children every week.

Most incidents occur in children under the age of 5, with those aged 1-3 at greatest risk.

When the word poison is mentioned, many people think of dishwashing detergents, bleach and household cleaners – however, did you know that there is another substance that is more commonly involved in childhood poisoning incidents?

The most common cause of poisoning lives in many homes and bags.

The majority of child hospitalisations due to poisoning involve pharmaceuticals. This can include over the counter medications such as paracetamol or cough and cold remedies, as well as prescription medications such as those used to treat blood pressure.

Take the product container with you to the phone – the poisons information centre will want to know what ingredients are in the product.

Poisoning incidents often occur due to unsupervised access, including when items such as medications are left out after being used or when they are stored in easily accessible locations such as handbags.

To children, medications can look like lollies, so they may think that they have just found Mum's, Dad's, or their grandparent's secret stash of treats, not realising the dangers that these items can pose.

Don't most of these products have child resistant packaging?

Many medications - along with other poisons such as household cleaners - come with child resistant lids or packaging. However, it's important to remember that these are not child proof. They are made to be difficult for children to get into, but not impossible – you may even find that some kids can open them easier than adults can.

What can I do to reduce the risk?

The good news is that there are some simple steps you can take to reduce the risk of accidental poisoning from medications:

- Store all poisonous products out of sight and reach of children, at least 1.5 metres off the ground in a lockable cupboard
- If medicines need to be kept in the fridge, use a small, lockable container for them
- Always read instructions carefully and return all poisonous products to their safe storage area immediately after use
- Administer medication in a well-lit room and keep a record of the time and amount of each dose, to reduce the risk of accidental overdose
- Never refer to medicines as 'lollies' as this can confuse children
- Keep handbags, including visitor's bags, out of reach of children e.g. on a hook up high
- Dispose of expired or unwanted medications. You can contact your local pharmacy for advice on how and where you can do this safely

What should I do if I think my child has ingested a poisonous substance?

If you think your child may have ingested a poisonous substance:

- Call the Poisons Information Centre straight away on 13 11 26 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week, Australia wide). They will be able to provide you with expert advice and guide you what to do next
- Never try to induce vomiting
- Take the product container with you to the phone – the poisons information centre will want to know what ingredients are in the product
- If they have collapsed, stopped breathing, or are having a seizure or anaphylactic reaction, call 000 for an ambulance

For more information and advice on poisoning or other unintentional injury topics, please visit kidsafevic.com.au