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How to Ease Back-to-School Anxiety in Your Child

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For families with children, back-to-school is one of the most important times of the year. Between school supply lists and new shoes, there can be real worries for both kids and parents. Friends and grades are also common causes of back-to-school stress. This year, we're also facing concerns about a global pandemic.

Due to COVID-19, some students are returning to classrooms for the first time in months. Friendships may have changed. It may be frustrating to have to learn some things over again. In addition, many students are running into new safety precautions that change

every part of their day.

Knowing what to expect can ease their minds

Change can be hard both physically and emotionally. Learning new routines, mealtimes, bedtimes and morning alarms is a lot to ask. Parents can help children prepare and know what to expect. Drawing up a simple schedule can make all the difference. You and your child can pick out pictures from a magazine to paste next to each activity. Your morning routine might include getting dressed, eating breakfast and brushing teeth.

Bedtime routines are important too

We all feel better after a good night's rest. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends 9 to 12 hours of sleep for children ages 6 to 12. Getting enough sleep helps attention, behavior, learning, memory, emotional regulation, quality of life, and mental and physical health.¹ Try keeping sleep times the same on the weekends too.

"I'm not going to school!"

A child who won't go to school can make an easy routine much harder. A hand-off plan can help. Think of a buddy in their class, an aide, the nurse or school psychologist who can help your child get excited about school. Giving your child an activity to look forward to can take their mind off their anxiety.²

Find ways to stay connected when you're apart

For some kids, being away from parents makes them worry. You can help by trying to keep connected during the day. Pack a small note with their lunch or give them a photo of your family to carry in their backpack.

Coming home can be hard too

Meltdowns after school are a common problem for kids. After holding it together all day and being on their best behavior, your child feels safe enough with you to let out what they're feeling.

How to deal with these big emotions? Calmly make sure nothing they're doing is unsafe, but try not to ask about their day or argue. Listen to their feelings and let them know that you're there if they need a hug or want to talk. When they've calmed down, you can have a better conversation.

Help kids learn to deal with their emotions

Children feel in control when they learn how to say what they're feeling by saying something like "I feel _____ because _____." Kids feel respected when parents really listen to them. Give feelings a clear name like disappointed, excited or bored. Let children know that feelings come and go. For older kids and teens, ask if they want advice, want you to help or just want to vent.

Make a plan to relax

What does your family enjoy doing? Once school starts, family fun often takes a back seat. With a little creativity, you can make relaxing part of your routine. Here are some ideas that don't require a lot of time:

- Take a walk or bike ride
- Play music
- Dance
- Take deep breaths
- Draw or paint
- Play
- Enjoy a healthy snack
- Read a book

Anxiety can be helpful too

Turn anxiety into something good by making a to-do list. Give kids a chance to try out solutions to their problems and learn along the way. Together, decide which worries they can tackle by doing something. Encourage them to let go of worries about things they can't control.

Manage your own stress

Kids pick up on what parents are feeling. Keep track of your own anxiety and be a role model for your kids. Show them that sometimes taking a break is the best thing you can do. If your family's schedule is too busy, think about cutting back on after-school activities.

Help is available

Anxiety that lasts longer than the first few weeks of school and seems excessive may require expert help.³ If you're concerned about your child's well-being, talk with your healthcare provider or school staff, who can help find resources in your community. Showing children that it's okay to ask for help is one more way to build their emotional health toolkit.

Take a deep breath

New things help children learn to make their way in the world. Kids are often more capable than we think. A daily mantra can remind them (and us) that they're "brave, strong and kind." When we provide a plan, guidance and love, we can help our children thrive.

References:

1. [AAP Endorses New Recommendations on Sleep Times](#)
2. [Child Mind Institute: Back to School Anxiety](#)
3. [Johns Hopkins University: 5 Tips to Ease Back-to-School Anxiety](#)

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