

Easing Back-to-School Anxieties in Children

Back-to-school season can be an exciting yet stressful time for families everywhere. Children are especially susceptible to anxiety and worry as they shift back to a structured routine following a relaxed summer. This year in particular poses its own unique challenges as parents prepare kids to return to school amidst the global pandemic. This guide is meant to provide tips and tricks to help ease your kids' anxiety as they transition back to school in a variety of classroom settings.

TIPS FOR Managing Back-to-School Anxiety



Practice your routine beforehand. Going back to a school routine can be difficult after a laid-back summer. It's a good idea to get your child back into the school-day routine a few days before school begins — even a week prior if you're able. This includes waking up on time, eating at scheduled times, and going to bed at regular times.

Communicate openly, offering empathy and support. Make sure to communicate that it's okay and completely normal to feel anxious and overwhelmed. Checking in on your kids' mental health can become a regular part of your parenting routine and will help the transition back to school.

Be mindful of expressing your own anxieties. Findings suggest that a parent externalizing anxiety symptoms can greatly affect pediatric mental health, so it's important to be aware of your own anxiety levels and try to keep them under control. The calmer and more positive you are about school, the better it will be for your child's mental health.

Teach simple, effective coping strategies. In some cases, simple coping strategies can help children manage difficult situations and make anxiety less overwhelming. Some child-friendly strategies include breathing exercises, journaling, and calming visualizations.

Seek professional care if needed. If a child's symptoms are severe or seem to worsen, consider taking them to therapy. In therapy, kids can learn simple techniques to help manage their anxiety, and it can help to carve a path for long-term mental wellbeing.

TIPS FOR Virtual Learning

Virtual classes come with a unique set of anxieties. Children may feel overwhelmed by the technology or confused by the non-traditional setting. Here are a few tips to help guide them through it.

Explore their online learning system together. Take some time and explore the online learning system with your child so that they feel prepared and fully understand everything they need to know. Some key areas to cover include making sure they know how to join classes, submit assignments, and turn on or off their video and microphone.

Set up a proper learning environment. If you're able, set aside an area of your home that is used specifically for your child's daily online learning. These settings should be quiet and distraction-free, to ensure the child is ready to learn. Avoid using beds, couches, or other "comfy" furniture if possible, as they're typically associated with sleep or leisure activities, which may impede the child's ability to focus.



Encourage socializing, even if virtually. Kids may miss the hustle and bustle of being at school and seeing their friends everyday. Make sure to set up playdates, even if virtually, with your children's friends. If you're the parent of a teenager, encourage them to continue to reach out to their friends, and make sure they're staying social.

Decide on a schedule, and stick with it. Remind your kids that while school may be virtual, it's still school. Set up a routine, and make sure they stick to it. Discuss with them what classes they'll be attending, what times they'll be attending them, and when they'll be able to take breaks. The more structure they have, the more likely they'll be to succeed.

TIPS FOR

In-Person Learning

Here's what parents, teachers, and guardians can do to help children feel more comfortable going back to in-person learning during the global pandemic.



Talk about what the school days are going to look like. Discuss with them the protective measures that are put into place, and how their school setting may look a bit different this year. If your child is anxious about wearing a mask to school, go shopping for a few masks and let them pick out ones they like. You can also make masks together, allowing your child to get creative with fun patterns or fabrics.

Remind them of the importance of social distancing and hygiene habits. Kids may be lax about keeping a safe social distance between their friends and peers. To combat this, gently remind them of why social distancing is so important, and practice proper handwashing techniques at home.

Focus on the positive. While it's important to prepare kids for the changes that come along with new protective measures, it's also crucial to remind them of what they like school in the first place. Talk to your kids about the things they enjoy most about school, and remind them of those things often, helping them to feel more excited and encouraged about returning to the classroom.

Keep open communication at all times. Check in with your kids daily to see how they're doing. Ask about any concerns or worries they may have, and lend an empathetic ear when they confide in you.

Going back to school can be a stressful time for kids even during a normal year. COVID-19 has taken away "normal" and replaced it with something unfamiliar. Returning to school may increase anxiety in children, but preparation and open communication are key factors in handling situations like this where there are many unknowns.

With the right tips and coping tools, adults can help children deal with their anxieties and transition back into the school year, regardless of the setting.

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