

Q&A: Helping kids adjust to school

September 6 2023, by Jessie Wolf



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My family is gearing up for the new school year, and I'm a bit worried about how my kids will adjust to being back in the classroom after the summer break. They seem excited yet nervous, and I want to ensure they adjust smoothly. Can I use any strategies or tips to ease their anxieties and make this adjustment period as positive as possible, especially for

the youngest entering kindergarten?

ANSWER: Back-to-school season can be an exciting time for students and parents. It's an educational milestone and another step closer to graduation, college or joining the workforce.

It's also a time for new beginnings—making new friends, reconnecting with old friends, meeting different teachers and picking up school supplies.

As you have experienced, going back to school also can cause a lot of stress and anxiety. Most people get nervous when they face changes. Kids may worry about attending a new school, adjusting to a new grade, being accepted by classmates and teachers, getting good grades, or leaving the safety and familiarity of home.

While these emotions are common, there are things that parents and guardians can do to help their students adjust to the new school year.

Try these tips to get started:

- Visit the school. Particularly for your youngest, who may be attending a new school, schedule a school campus visit if possible. Many schools will offer new students and their parents an opportunity to meet teachers before school starts and to see the new school. This also can be helpful for older students. Locating their classrooms, lockers, restrooms and other areas around the school on such a visit can help ease many first-day fears.
- Talk about their worries. You can help by reassuring your children that anxious feelings are common and encouraging them to talk about what causes them. When [kids](#) think about or practice doing the things that make them anxious, they can learn

to cope better with their feelings.

- Review homework expectations. Identify a location in your home where children will do homework each day. This could be desks in their rooms, at the kitchen table or in another location. Talk about when they should start their homework. Some families encourage students to start right after they get home, while others allow a break. Review your expectations for grades and how the family will address academic challenges. Setting expectations before school starts will help you and your students.
- Develop a good sleep routine. On average, children ages 6-13 require nine to 11 hours of sleep each night. Children who are 13-17 should get eight to 10 [hours of sleep](#) a night. Develop consistent sleep routines so your students can mentally and emotionally prepare for bedtime. For example, put all electronics away one hour before bedtime, and keep charging stations away from bedrooms to decrease distractions. Additional routine items may be taking a shower, reading a bedtime story, getting a drink or snack, and brushing teeth.
- Eat a healthy breakfast each morning. Eating a balanced breakfast is an integral part of every day. For kids, breakfast is necessary to provide energy for the brain and body. Proper nutrition can help prepare them for learning. If they're hungry, they're more likely to have difficulty focusing.
- Plan for school-related conflicts. School years allow students to learn how to navigate relationships outside of their family and prepare them for adulthood. That may sometimes mean working through a conflict or disagreement with a peer or teacher. Practice different strategies, such as taking deep breaths to cool down, asking questions and paraphrasing the other person's perspective, or brainstorming positive solutions that benefit everyone.

Keep in mind that the goal of parenting is to raise independent adults. It's

a natural response for parents to want to step in and solve the problem to protect their children from conflict. However, stepping in too often decreases kids' ability to develop the skills and confidence needed to be independent adults who self-advocate. Giving them tools to process and develop solutions on their own builds lifelong skills and helps you more easily identify when an issue is serious and requires parental involvement.

Sometimes, routines and plans aren't enough. If your child's fears or anxiety interfere with [daily activities](#) and [school](#), it's time to talk with a mental health professional.

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Citation: Q&A: Helping kids adjust to school (2023, September 6) retrieved 14 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-09-qa-kids-adjust-school.html>

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