

Tips to help your child adjust to a new school year

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Back-to-school can feel like a rushed jumble, as kids leave behind summer fun for the next step in their education.

But there are specific ways parents can help students show up sharper, get [young athletes](#) ready to compete, and have anxious kids settled down and ready to learn, experts say.

Prioritize sleep

Kids will have a good start to the school year if they enter it with sound sleep hygiene, experts say.

"We spend a third of our life sleeping, so a regular sleep/wake schedule leads to better sleep and a healthier life," said Dr. Tara Thomas, an assistant professor of sleep psychiatry at Baylor College of Medicine. "Growth hormones are secreted during different stages of sleep, and sleep helps with growth, development and recall and memory storage."

The recommended sleep duration for kids of various ages includes:

- Ages 3 to 5: 10 to 13 hours
- Ages 6 to 13: 9 to 11 hours
- Teenagers: 8 to 10 hours

A wind-down routine prior to bedtime can help kids settle down for the evening. This routine can include bathing, brushing teeth and reading a bedtime story, Thomas said.

A technology curfew also is essential, as light emitted from smartphones and tablets suppresses the sleep hormone melatonin. Devices can also be an overstimulating distraction that robs kids of sleep.

Athletic support

Parents should make sure that their student athlete is in [good health](#)

before hitting the field, experts say.

"New and seasoned athletes need to get sport physicals to help find and address health issues that could interfere with their ability to perform or increase their chances of getting injured," Dr. Marcus Knox, a physical therapist in Baylor's Department of Orthopedic Surgery, said in a Baylor news release. "Physicals also help monitor growth and development over longer periods of time."

Student athletes need a proper balanced diet as well, including whole grains, fruits and healthy fats, experts said.

Specifically, they recommend a combination of protein and carbs following a workout, ideally with a 3-to-1 ratio of carbs to protein. Lean proteins like chicken or fish will help build muscle, while complex carbs like brown rice, sweet potatoes and vegetables will fuel athletic efforts.

Athletes also need to drink enough fluids to replenish what they lose in sweat. Students should drink 8 to 10 glasses of water a day and take electrolytes regularly. However, experts recommend avoiding high-sugar sports drinks.

To protect against injury, athletes should be encouraged to perform dynamic warm-ups prior to any training or competition. Training should include two to three days a week of strength training and one to two days of conditioning each week, although this could vary depending on the sport and the season, Knox said.

Calming the jitters

Heading back to school can be an anxious time for many kids, but parents can help ease these jitters.

The most important thing is to teach students to work through their worries rather than avoid them, said Dr. Andres Arturo Avellaneda Ojeda, an associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Baylor.

"It's natural to want to allow your child to avoid situations that make them anxious or reassure them that their worries won't come true," Ojeda said. "However, this can actually contribute to a [vicious cycle](#) that reinforces anxiety in the long term."

"Instead, acknowledge your child's emotion and then help them think through [small steps](#) they might take to approach, rather than avoid, their worries," Ojeda added.

Signs of an anxious student include:

- Constantly seeking reassurance
- Asking repeated worried questions, despite already receiving an answer
- Physical complaints like headache, stomach pain or fatigue, even though they're not sick
- Significant changes in sleep patterns
- Avoiding school-related activities like school tours or teacher meet-and-greets

Parents can help by having their kid focus on what they can control, like their own efforts and attitudes, rather than getting bogged down in factors outside their influence.

Students can learn how to reframe anxious thoughts by reminding themselves of past successes and their own abilities, Ojeda added. Deep breathing, meditation or light exercise can help calm nerves.

Parents also should model behavior they want to see from their kids, Ojeda said.

For example, remain calm if an anxious child has a tantrum about attending school or refuses to get on the school bus. Remember that their behavior is being driven by anxiety, and take a deep breath. If necessary, step away from the situation for a few minutes, calm your own emotions, and then come back ready to help them.

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