Coping with Back-to-School Anxiety

Heading back to school can be difficult for both kids and parents. Whether a child is off to kindergarten, transitioning to high school, or even leaving for college, the change can be stressful and cause anxiety at home. While some worries are normal, there are signs that may indicate something more serious is going on with your child. Fortunately there are things you can do to help reduce anxiety levels in both your child and yourself.

1. **Talk to your child.** Never underestimate the power of talking with your child about their fears and encouraging them to share their feelings. Make sure to pick a time when you can provide your undivided attention. Try to avoid giving simple reassurances and instead offer solutions to their worries or potential problems. Don’t forget to focus on the positive. Making new friends and learning new skills are just some of the exciting things your child has to look forward to at school.

2. **Make a plan.** Does your child have anxieties over specific issues such as taking the bus or getting to know a new teacher? Tackle these fears head on with practice! Drive the new bus route or walk with your child to school. Talk about bus safety and what your child can expect. Try to meet a new teacher before school starts. Help your child make specific plans for when they encounter new situations while at school. Sometimes role play can help.

3. **Transition to the new schedule before school starts.** Rather than jumping into a new routine all at once, start gradually a couple of weeks before the big day. Set alarm clocks, practice getting up earlier, and plan a fun trip to shop for school supplies or new clothes. If starting at a new school, visit the school with your child and familiarize them with the classroom, cafeteria, etc.

4. **Be aware of your own behavior.** Our children learn a lot from watching us. Try to keep your own separation anxieties under control while with your children. Keep your goodbyes short but positive. The more confidence you model, the more your child will understand that there is no need to be anxious or afraid. Praise your child when they demonstrate confidence on their own.

5. **Know when it’s time to seek professional help.** As summer comes to a close, everyone is usually a little sad. However, if your child or teenager’s disposition has changed or if they no longer enjoy the things they used to, something else may be at fault. Your child’s mental health is just as important as their physical health and depression can affect anyone at any age. If you are concerned, take an online mental health screening on behalf of your child at [www.HelpYourselfHelpOthers.org](http://www.HelpYourselfHelpOthers.org). Discussing your concerns with your doctor is also a positive step.

Just like us, our children will face many transitions throughout their lives. Proactive parenting and prioritizing mental health can go a long way in relieving a child’s anxiety.