

Back to School Tips



Mental Health America recognizes that the beginning of a new school year can be an exciting yet stressful time for children, with new teachers and classmates, bigger classrooms, new routines and more schoolwork. This time can be particularly unnerving and overwhelming for children who are facing major transitions such as starting elementary school or entering middle school. As a parent there are important steps you can take to support your child as he or she heads back to school.

1. Know that your child's mental health is just as important as their physical health.
2. Plans for a good school year start in the summer. Begin establishing a "back to school" routine at least two weeks prior to school starting to minimize stress and help with the transition.
3. Healthy food and beverages and good quality sleep are necessary for academic success.
4. Express interest and enthusiasm about the start of the school year. If you are confident and excited, your child will be too.
5. Start the conversation! Talk to your child about your expectations as well as his/her expectations for the upcoming school year. Take time to listen to your child and discuss aspects of the new school year that he or she is worried about.
6. If you have visited your child's school already, you are one step ahead of the game. If not, take a walk around the school with your child and locate his or her classrooms, lunchroom, playground and restrooms. This will help keep your child from feeling lost on the first day. When visiting prior to the first day is not an option, if the school has a website, allow your child to visit the site as there may be photos of the classroom, playground, school staff, required school supplies, schedules, other children, etc.
7. Remember to let your child know that it's normal to feel nervous about the start of school. For parents of younger children, suggest that your child take a family photo or special object (with permission from school) to school to make his or her surroundings more comfortable.
8. Spend time each day talking to your child about what happened in school. Be open to hearing the good and the not so good. Give your child positive feedback about his or her new experiences.
9. Praise and encourage your child to become involved with school activities and to try new things.
10. Encourage your child to try to make friends and to be a friend. School is a "social hub" that can be a very lonely place without a friend or two.
11. Attend school functions and stay involved in your child's education and engaged with school staff. Children whose parents are more involved with their education have higher achievement, are better adjusted and are less likely to drop out of school.
12. Be proactive in learning about how your child is developing not just physically, but socially and emotionally, as well. If you are aware of what's typical behavior and thoughts for your child's stage of life, you will be able to tell more readily when things may not be right.

13. Know the signs of bullying. Bullying can take the form of direct bullying such as pushing, kicking, teasing, name-calling, destroying belongings as well as indirect action such as leaving someone out of a group, spreading rumors and cyber bullying. If your child is the bully or being bullied, swift action involving school staff is necessary.

Anxiety and stress about starting school is normal for a child and usually passes within the first few days or weeks. If your child continues to seem anxious or stressed, it may be time to seek help. Talk to your child's teacher, other classroom-based staff as well as your pediatrician about what you can do as a parent. If problems persist, consider getting a referral to a trained and qualified mental health professional.

Other Resources



ASCD

1703 North Beauregard Street

Alexandria, VA 22311

Phone: 703-575-5400

Email: info@ascd.org

Website:

<http://www.ascd.org/SearchResults.aspx?s=mental%20health&c=1&n=10&p=0>

Wellness Works in Schools Program

Kinder Associates, L.L.C.

114 Buch Avenue

Lancaster, Pennsylvania 17601

Phone: 717-569-3969

Website: <http://www.wellnessworksinschools.com>

National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health

9605 Medical Center Drive

Suite #280

Rockville, Maryland 20850

Website: <http://www.ffcmh.org/>

SAMHSA's Health Information Network

P.O. Box 2345

Rockville, MD 20847-2345

Phone: 1-877-726-4727

Email: SAMHSAInfo@samhsa.hhs.gov

Website: <http://www.samhsa.gov/children/>

TeenScreen National Center for Mental Health Checkups at Columbia University
1775 Broadway, Suite 1401
New York, NY 10019
Phone: (212) 265-4453
Email: TeenScreenInfo@nyspi.columbia.edu

Additional Website Resources:

School Family (Parent Online Resources) Website: <http://www.schoolfamily.com/>

Kid Source Website: <http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content3/back.school.p.k12.4.html>

School Mental Health Website: <http://www.schoolmentalhealth.org/index.html>