



Tips for Getting Kids Ready for Back-to-School

Returning to school can be stressful for both parents and children. No matter what their age, feeling apprehensive about going back is normal. Fortunately, there's a lot you can do to soothe their apprehension and get them back into routine.

1 Normalize the anxiety or apprehension about going back.

Examples:

"I know it's been so nice being at home, staying up late, and playing with friends/family. Change is really hard, even for adults. I understand you feel worried and it's ok—lots of kids feel that way."

"It's hard not knowing what this year is going to be like. I can see you feel worried/nervous/scared about going back and that's ok."

Discuss the scenarios that worry them, and help them plan a strategy and rehearse it so they'll know what to do.

2 Get their sleep on track early.

Start about 2 weeks before the first day of school – this takes time, so don't rush it. A few weeks before school starts, get your child into the habit of going to bed earlier. If your child is amped up utilize grounding activities such as bath time, reading, or playing quietly in their room with the lights dimmed before bed. Listening to a guided meditation app in bed can also help (listening only). We recommend no screens 1-2 hours before sleep.

3 Re-establish a routine.

Establishing a consistent & predictable routine is important for children and youth (and often just as helpful for the adults). Write out and review the routine for back to school with your child so they know what to expect. You can post the schedule on the fridge or in their room.

4 Encourage ownership.

When children feel they have **healthy amounts of control and autonomy with their schooling they will feel more confident and less anxious**. Allow your child to participate in the process such as choosing, organizing, and labelling school supplies, and exploring afterschool activities they're interested in exploring (vs. you deciding what they should enroll in) can help your child feel more competent.

Furthermore, we encourage you to explore what chores your child will be responsible for once school resumes. Feeling they contribute to the families home also helps **establishes a sense of competency and fosters belonging**.



5 Discuss and plan out healthy habits in advance.

Brainstorm healthy snack and lunch options in advance during the school week (maybe allowing 1 day a week for them to splurge on something less healthy).

Start thinking about activities that will encourage healthy physical movement that you can incorporate into your week in realistic ways—get your child's input. Ensure you are also discussing ways which you will do this as well—lead by example and children are more likely to follow.

6 Limit screen time.

Most children can more screen time during the summers than they do during school, so cutting back is natural but also can elicit a bit of a push back. Similar to sleep schedules, a few weeks before school starts re-establish screen time limits.

Suggestions:

- Have the whole family “unplug” in the evenings after dinner time during week days
- Plug in all devices in an office or the kitchen (for some kids you may need to lock them up)
- Have tech-free windows during the weekend where your children have to find other things to do other than be on their device or watching tv (this includes parents)
- No devices in bedrooms after bedtime (use an alarm clock not a phone to wake up)

7 Getting to School.

If your children are starting at a new school, practice walking or driving to the bus stop or to the school a week before school starts. If your children are younger you can allow them to play in the playground at the school they will be attending so they make positive associations with the school before the academic year starts.

8 Visiting the school.

Many schools are very understanding about children's anxiety. It can be helpful if you contact the school a week or two before class starts and ask if your child can see his or her classroom.

9 Find out who their teacher(s) are going to be.

A huge trigger for children is not knowing what to expect from their new teacher. If possible (we understand it might not be though) contact the school a week or two before classes commence, find out who their teacher is going to be, and ask for the teacher's work email. Let them know your child is feeling anxious and you just want to know a little more about them. What are their favorite things? What is something fun they do in their class? What is something interesting they want their students to know about them? If schools have photos of their teachers on their website, showing your child a picture of their teacher can also help ease jitters. If possible you can even request an in-person meet and greet before classes start.

*** if any teachers are reading this we encourage you to write a letter to your students introducing yourself along with a photo of yourself to help to help ease their anxiety (email to your students parents)*

10 Safe adults

If your child is in the same school as the previous year, who can your child go to if they are overwhelmed (if they don't “know” their teacher yet)? Is there a school counselor or former trusted teacher or educational assistant? Attachment is vital to children feeling psychologically safe, so a child knowing they can connect with someone safe is imperative for emotion regulation.

If it's a new school, research who is available for students to reach out to if they feel overwhelmed. This information can often be found on school websites, or you can call the school to ask a few weeks before classes resume.