

Tips for dealing with back-to-school stress

Pay attention to your own stress levels. The start of the school year can be stressful for adults as well as kids! If you are stressed, it's possible that children will sense and react to your emotions. Do what you can do to relieve your own stress and take care of yourself!

Do a test run. You can practice going through the drop-off and pick-up area so that you and your student know what to do on the first day. If you're able, come to Meet the Teacher Night so that your child can meet their teacher and find their classroom.

Keep your comments about the school year positive. If you express frustrations or concerns about your child's teacher or school in front of them, it can add to their reluctance. Try to focus on the things that your child enjoys about school, such as seeing friends, going to specials, or learning their favorite subject.

Start adjusting their schedule before school starts. It's normal for children to sleep in and have a lot of free time over the summer. Help children adjust their sleep schedule, get their clothes ready the night before, and have structured meal times as much as possible in the days leading up to school.

Listen to your child's worries. Acknowledge that it's normal to feel worried about a new school year and listen when your student shares their feelings. Let them know that other kids feel the same way. Sometimes, you can help students brainstorm how to manage certain situations or how to ask for help. If your student is worried about specific situations or people, communicate with their teacher.

Encourage independence in your child as much as is developmentally appropriate. Your child might feel more confident about school when they are capable of completing simple tasks on their own, such as tying their shoes, zipping their jacket, and opening snack containers by themselves. For the tasks that they can't accomplish independently, teach them how to ask for help.

Encourage activities that reduce worries. This can include playing outside, exercising, coloring, journaling, listening to music, deep breathing, or other relaxing activities.

Arrange for your child to talk to their school friends or set up a play date. Children might feel less worried about school when they remember their friends will be there, too.

THE BEST THING you can do for your child on the first day is a structured but timely farewell. It may be hard to leave if your child is crying. But a confident farewell, assurance that you will see them after school, and quick hand-off to school staff, will help the teacher get your child calmed down and involved in school activities quickly. Long farewells, staying in the school to watch, or long talks with them in the hall can feed into their worries and hopes to go home. Please ask for help from school staff if you need it! You can also check in with the teacher later to ask how your child is doing.

If your child continues to struggle with school-related stress past the first few weeks of school, consider getting outside help. You can contact the school counselor for assistance or look into outpatient therapists to help your child work through their feelings.