



Back-to-School Transitions: Tips for Parents

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Getting a new school year off to a good start can influence children's attitude, confidence, and performance both socially and academically. The transition from August to September can be difficult for both children and parents. Even children who are eager to return to class must adjust to the greater levels of activity, structure, and, for some, pressures associated with school life. The degree of adjustment depends on the child, but parents can help their children manage the increased pace of life by planning ahead, being realistic, and maintaining a positive attitude. Here are a few suggestions to help ease the transition and promote a successful school experience.

Before School Starts

- ***Good physical and mental health.*** Schedule doctor and dental checkups early. Discuss any concerns you have over your child's emotional or psychological development with your pediatrician.
- ***Review all school information.*** As soon as it arrives, review and return important forms and mark your calendar with important dates.
- ***Buy school supplies early.***
- ***Re-establish the bedtime and mealtime routines.*** Re-establish the bedtime and mealtime routines at least 1 week before school starts, include pre-bedtime reading and household chores if these were suspended during the summer.
- ***Turn off the TV.*** This will help ease your child into the learning process and school routine. If possible, maintain this practice throughout the school year. Television is distracting for many children, and your child will arrive at school better prepared to learn each morning if he or she has engaged in less passive activities.
- ***Designate and clear a place to do homework.*** Older children should have the option of studying in their room or a quiet area of the house. Younger children usually need an area set aside in the family room or kitchen to facilitate adult monitoring, supervision, and encouragement.
- ***Select a spot to keep backpacks and lunch boxes.*** Designate a spot for your children to place their school belongings as well as a place to put important notices and information sent home for you to see. Explain that emptying their backpack each evening is part of their responsibility, even for young children.
- ***Freeze a few easy dinners.*** It will be much easier on you if you have dinner prepared so that meal preparation will not add to household tensions during the first week of school.

The First Week

- ***Clear your own schedule.*** Make yourself available and help your child acclimate to the school routine and overcome the confusion or anxiety that many children experience at the start of a new school year.
- ***Make lunches and set alarm clocks the night before school.*** Have children help make lunches and set their own alarm clocks. Praise them for prompt response to morning schedules and bus pickups. Allow plenty of time to get up, eat, and get to school.
- ***After school.*** Review the after school routine. Be very specific, particularly with young children. Put a note card in their backpack with the name(s) and number(s) of a neighbor who is home during the day as well as a number where you can be reached.
- ***Review your child's schoolbooks.*** Share your enthusiasm for the subjects and your confidence in your child's ability to master the content. Reinforce learning skills and encourage your child to be patient, attentive, and positive.
- ***Familiarize yourself with your child's teacher and school professionals.*** At back-to-school night introduce yourself to the teachers. Find out how they like to communicate with parents (e.g., through notes, e-mail, or phone calls). Convey a sincere desire to be a partner with your children's teachers to enhance their learning experience. Make an effort to find out who it is in the school or district who can be a resource for you and your child. Learn their roles and how best to access their help if you need them. This can include the principal and front office personnel; school psychologist, counselor, and social worker; the reading specialist, speech therapist, and school nurse; and the after-school activities coordinator.



Overcoming Anxiety

- ***Let your children know you care.*** If your child is anxious about school, send personal notes in the lunch box or book bag. Reinforce the ability to cope. Children absorb their parent's anxiety, so model optimism and confidence for your child. Let your child know that it is natural to be a little nervous anytime you start something new but that your child will be just fine once he or she becomes familiar with classmates, the teacher, and school routine.
- ***Do not overreact.*** If the first few days are a little rough, try not to overreact. Young children in particular may experience separation anxiety or shyness initially but teachers are trained to help them adjust. If you drop them off, try not to linger. Reassure them that you love them, will think of them during the day, and will be back.
- ***Remain calm and positive.*** Acknowledge anxiety over a bad experience the previous year. Children who had a difficult time academically or socially or were teased or bullied may be more fearful or reluctant to return to school. If you have not yet done so, share your child's concern with the school and confirm that the problem has been addressed. Reassure your child that the problem will not occur again in the new school year, and that you and the school are working together to prevent further issues.
- ***Reinforce your child's ability to cope.*** Give your child a few strategies to manage a difficult situation on his or her own. But encourage your child to tell you or the teacher if the problem persists. Maintain open lines of communication with the school.
- ***Plan to volunteer in the classroom.*** If possible, plan to volunteer in the classroom at least periodically throughout the year. Doing so helps your child understand that school and family life are linked and that you care about the learning experience. Being in the classroom is also a good way to develop a relationship with your child's teachers and classmates, and to get firsthand exposure to the classroom environment and routine. Most teachers welcome occasional parent help, even if you cannot volunteer regularly.

Extracurricular Activities

Go for quality, not quantity. Your child will benefit most from one or two activities that are fun, reinforce social development, and teach new skills. Too much scheduled time can be stressful, especially for young children, and may make it harder to concentrate on schoolwork. When evaluating extracurricular activities, consider your family schedule and personal energy level. Multiple activities per child may be too much to manage, particularly if the activities have overlapping times, disparate locations, require your attendance, or disrupt the dinner hour.

Select activities where you have someone with whom you can carpool. Choosing activities that occur on-site after school will also minimize driving. Find out from the school or teacher which days will be heavy homework or test study days and schedule extracurricular activities accordingly.

If your child does not want to participate in organized extracurricular activities, consider other options to help build interests and social skills. For example, check out the local library for monthly reading programs, investigate community education programs, or talk to other parents and schedule regular play dates with their children.

Distributed by the Coalition for Children's Mental Health

The Coalition for Children's Mental Health, based in Hudson, Ohio, is a not for profit organization dedicated to increasing awareness of behavioral and emotional disorders in children and youth. The Coalition's goal is to promote early intervention and to prevent the physical, emotional and social consequences of failure to treat. By encouraging the entire community to support children and youth who suffer from these disorders, the Coalition works to reduce stigma and increase understanding and early treatment of mental illnesses in children. The Coalition is comprised of parents, teachers and community leaders who want to make a difference in the lives of our youth. Programs and activities sponsored by the Coalition encourage youth and their families to learn more about children's mental health and overall physical well-being.

In October 2009, the Coalition will be celebrating its 10th year of Children's Mental Health Week in Hudson. The Children's Poster Contest, Community Heroes, and Community Awards Banquet all provide opportunities for children and their families to gain knowledge about children's mental health.

To volunteer, donate, or get involved with the Coalition for Children's Mental Health, please visit www.hudsonccmh.org or call 234.380.9061.