



BACK TO SCHOOL GUIDE FOR PARENTS OF YOUNG KIDS

Back to school can be tough. Here are some tips to help manage the stress.

ROUTINES: Going to school means getting into new routines with no more late nights or late mornings.

- Find a set bed-time that lets your kids feel well-rested in the morning
- Practice the back to school routine a few times before the first day (e.g., go to bed, get up, dress, eat breakfast, brush teeth, and be out the door by 8am)
- Have your child help prepare what you can the night before (pick out clothes, pack healthy lunch your child likes, pack school bag, etc)
- Talk to your child's school and find out what the routines are. Help your child to understand what is expected – practice new or difficult skills at home before school starts

FOCUS ON THE POSITIVES: Going back to school is easier for everyone if a child has something to look forward to.

- Purchasing school supplies or clothes with your child is a good way to help your son or daughter become more enthusiastic about starting a new school year. Check with your school to find out what your child will need this year
- Try to help your child get excited about school in other ways (e.g., see friends they haven't seen all summer, tell a favourite teacher about their summer vacation)
- Talk to your child about the fun activities he or she will get to do and the new friends they will make

NEW PEOPLE & SITUATIONS: The new school year brings a new classroom setting, with a different teacher and new classmates. When kids know what to expect things are less scary for them.

- Introducing your child to one or more of his or her classmates ahead of time will ensure making friends is a little easier and less scary (your school may help you connect to other classmates)
- Visit the school and the teacher with your child. Ask the teacher to explain the school day to your child, and if possible ask to be shown around the classroom
- Give your child some ice-breakers that can be shared such as a healthy snack or activity (e.g., marbles or sidewalk chalk if your school allows them)
- Find out if your child's school has a buddy or mentor system



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PERFORMANCE ANXIETY AND OTHER WORRIES: Kids can have real worries about starting school. Attending school may be the first time your child experiences clear pressure to do well.

- Respond to signs of anxiety by talking to your child about school concerns
- Make time to listen when kids want to talk - review your child's worries one at a time and help them problem solve so they don't become overwhelmed
- Try not to add to your child's pressures unnecessarily
- Help your child to understand that no one is good at everything – both parents and kids do better at some things than others
- Be involved with school related activities or events - praise your child for positive efforts even if you don't see the results yet

GRADUAL ENTRY: This is a method parents often use when getting children used to a new day care but it can also work with children who are extremely fearful of school. You will need to talk about this idea with your child's teacher to see if your school can accommodate this approach.

- Examples of gradual entry include staying with your child for part or all of the first day or first few days. Then you gradually stay at school with your child a shorter and shorter amount of time
- For some kids gradual entry may only take one or two days. For others it may take a couple of weeks. Let your child be the guide, as every child is different
- Some children are happiest if mom or dad always stays while they hang up their jacket and put their bag away before leaving for the day
- Tell your child in advance how long you will stay and then stick to your plan

BULLYING: Bullying at school is a serious problem and can, in extreme cases, result in injury or even death. If you suspect that your child is being bullied ...

- Reassure your child that you and the teacher will support him or her
- Talk to the teacher or person in charge
- Follow up on any action taken and remain involved in the decision making process. Check in often with your son or daughter about how things are going
- Keep in mind children may be reluctant to talk due to fear of embarrassment or further harm

Sometimes problems with going back to school don't go away on their own and may reflect a health problem. Talk to your family physician or health professional about any problems – especially if they are severe or do not resolve on their own after the first few weeks back.

Select Sources & Useful Resources

Facts for Families series from American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/index.htm

Resources for Families:

National Mental Health and Education Center

www.naspcenter.org/parents/parents.html

BC Safe Schools & Communities Centre

www.safeschools.gov.bc.ca/related_resources.html

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