

Back-to-School Stress: The Causes and Solutions

As September approaches, it signals the beginning of a new school year. For children, the end of summer means returning back to the morning rush, the assignments and the general quicker pace of life. The “back-to-school” time also indicates the start of novel challenges and changes which include new teachers, different classmates and harder material. The initiative of the busier lifestyle is exciting for some children, yet for others it is considered a stressful experience.

The mysterious upcoming academic year induces feelings of anxiety and stress. For a child who struggles with transitions, starting from scratch and adapting to a new teaching style is very stressful. Children are often concerned about who their teachers will be and whether or not they will be able to do well. Other children might worry about maintaining their previous friendships and making new friends as well. Moreover, some children suffer from separation anxiety disorder which makes it severely difficult for them to separate them from their parent’s presence.

The major shift in routine enforces an end to staying up late and sleeping until noon. Therefore, children are forced to return to a booked schedule which ranges from rushing in the morning to an early night curfew. These changes put a huge amount of stress on children because they are no longer able to have all the free time they want. Instead, they become compelled to finishing their homework and studying for exams.

School is often believed to be physically, socially or emotionally over-stimulating for children. Some students may worry about starting school because their academic performance is weak. On the other hand, some children feel stressed due to their low self-esteem which affects their classroom participation making them feel confused and left out. In other cases, children might be bullied or socially isolated which also plays a role in elevating anxiety.

“Back to school” stress is not solely agitating for children, but also for parents. However, kids quickly notice when their parents are under stress. As a result, it is vital for parents not to show their anxiety rather focus on the excitement of starting school which could help encourage the child. Parents should manage their own anxiety by being calm, confident and supportive. In turn, this parental stability will reflect on the child by minimizing their worry.

Children do not always verbalize their stress, thus it is important for parents to keep the lines of communication open. Parents should be available to talk and listen to what their child likes and dislikes about school. This can be an excellent time to uncovering crucial topics such as how to handle bullies, learning difficulties and peer pressures. Parents can also share similar personal experience in order to show their children that it is normal to feel anxious and that solutions do exist. These open parent-child discussions help highlight the parents' love, support and understanding.

In addition to discussing the worries of children, parents should plan and focus on a new routine with their children. It is helpful to practice sleeping and eating patterns around two weeks before school. Parents and children can pretend that school has already begun in terms of night curfews, getting up in the morning and eating meals. This will help achieve a consistent routine that will help the child's body to adjust to the new busier schedule.

Modeling a low-stress lifestyle for children can also help them cope with their anxiety. As a result, parents should engage their children in daily relaxing activities such as meditation, downtime, rest or exercise. By practicing calm activities, kids are given the opportunity to build adaptive coping strategies that can be used when they are under stress.

Nonetheless, when planning the daily routine of children, parents should not feel obligated to schedule every minute of a child's free time. Thus, parents should include a time in the day for unstructured play where children are free to explore their imagination. In turn, this play time will provide the child with a healthy outlet for the pressures of the day.

After the long lazy days of summer, "back-to-school" stress is a typical part of readjusting to the start of a new academic year. This anxiety usually fades away after the first month of school with the aid of a structured routine. As a result, the trick for parents is to help reduce their children's stress and also manage their own hopes for their child's new upcoming year.