

Back to School

“I don't want to go to school”, your child tells you before the start of the new school year. Disappointed you want to respond with anger, but take a deep breath and spend some time listening to what is troubling your child as it will provide you with the information you need to help her cope with feelings of anxiety.

Listening means giving your child the space to express herself without judgement and criticism. Acknowledge her feelings and reassure her that she has your love and support.

Remember, change is stressful

We all know how stressful change can be and for some children, change is extremely nerve-wracking. Children thrive on consistency and predictability, so not knowing who her teacher will be or what she can expect on the first day of school can be scary for her.

Coping techniques

While you cannot predict who her teacher/s will be for the year, you can give her coping techniques such as deep breathing, focusing on the positives, (what she likes about her new teacher), and effective note taking, (writing down important things her teacher says on a note pad so she doesn't forget them by the time she gets home). Stay with her on the first day until she has been placed with her new teacher and give her the thumbs up before you leave.

If your child is worrying about being put in a class with a strict teacher, help her devise a plan for the year. Being helpful, kind, diligent and listening well are traits that all teachers value in children and which can be beneficial in endearing her to a stern teacher.

Ideally the teacher should be meeting the needs of the children, but teaching your child how to read a person's body language, and learning how to manage different personalities are useful skills that will be beneficial for her throughout her life. Obviously you should never subject your child to a teacher who ridicules or taunts children. This is bullying and is unacceptable.

Breaking the attachment to last year's teachers and classmates

Children attach to friends and teachers during the year so being separated from a teacher of whom they were fond and their best friends can be like a death for them. They need time to mourn the loss and will often want to go back and visit the teacher from the previous year. Be patient while your child works through her feelings and encourage her to meet up with her friends at break and after school as well as persuade her to make a new friend.

Moving up a grade

Moving up a grade can bring perceived pressures for children as they believe they will not cope with the harder assignments. Reassure your child by telling her that you will provide her with the support and help she may need to do well. Explain that the school year usually starts with revision and that she should let you know if she experiences difficulties. Knowing that she has your support will give her the confidence to try new things.

Empowering your child

Help your child organise her school bag, files, books, and sports equipment as she familiarizes herself with a new timetable. Giving her practical tips you know that work to help organise herself will produce feelings of independence and empowerment.

Where the anxiety and stress lies

Most anxiety and stress in children comes from needing to meet the high standards their parents set for them and constantly wanting to please their parents. Reassess your expectations for your child, and find new ways of interacting with her especially when it comes to homework. If she tells you she is not enjoying a particular after school activity allow her to drop it, even if it means you have to give up your dreams. A childhood controlled is an adulthood destined for disappointment and misery.

Share your own school experience

Comfort your child by telling her positive stories about how you coped with stress and anxiety when you were at school. Children love to hear stories and knowing that you coped and survived will give her the strength to do the same.

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