

Back to School Tips for Parents

Whether their summer was jam-packed with activities or filled with complaints about being bored with nothing to do, kids often have a tough time making the back-to-school transition. Back-to-school time can be exceptionally difficult for the 20 percent of children who suffer from a mental health or learning disorder [1].

Here are six things' parents need to know about starting school with vulnerable children

1. Mental health problems emerge at back-to-school time.

Children with special needs require a lot of help learning how to manage a new schedule. As a parent, you can ease your child's anxiety by modeling confidence and Calm Behavior, and by imposing structure in family life such as dinner time, homework time, and even bedtime.

But if your child is displaying symptoms of anxiety and begins having unusual difficulties in school, you should immediately discuss these concerns with your child's teacher, and request for him/her to be evaluated by a school counselor or mental health professional, as well as someone who can advise on whether a child's problems are typical or require further evaluation.

2. Kids' brains are changing dramatically.

Intense changes occur in the brains of children, particularly as they enter their teens. The teen brain starts is constantly hardwiring itself towards adulthood. This temporary imbalance in certain areas of the brain has been linked to teens' erratic and risky behaviors, as well as the onset of symptoms that can fall under anxiety, depression, emotional outbursts, aggression, and substance use[2].

It's important to keep communicate openly with your child during this vulnerable time, when teenagers are starting to look like adults, and think they are adults, but may not have the skills to manage stress and triggers when they present themselves. If you haven't already started setting time aside each day to talk to your child about challenges and new experiences at school, now is the perfect moment.

3. Anxious parents send anxious kids to school.

Symptoms of Anxiety can often have a genetic component [3]. Not to mention, anxious people often tend to marry other anxious people; children with two anxious parents are at especially

elevated risk. But genetics are just one factor. Environment is another. Kids really *are* like sponges, absorbing the energy and adopting the behaviors around them.

One of the most helpful things you can do is model calm, confident behavior, particularly while helping a child get ready for school. A child usually starts school no calmer than her least-relaxed parent.

4. Teachers matter more than you think.

Teachers get to know a child's family through the child's eyes, and they get to know how a child behaves *without* their parent present. This means parents can get all kinds of information about a child from their teacher—information about learning short comings, peer issues, as well as academic achievements and close friendships.

Good questions to ask include: How is my child doing? Do you have any concerns about his social or academic skills? Do you think he needs my help with anything?

5. Homework time is crucial.

Love it or hate it, homework is a particularly important part of school. To help kids get back into the scholastic swing of things, encourage kids to:

- Develop decent work habits from the get-go, like taking notes, writing down assignments, and turning in homework on time
- Take their time with schoolwork
- Ask the teacher if they do not understand something

6. Don't jump to conclusions.

Kids grow and develop at different rates. Ideally, a child will meet certain Developmental milestones in accordance to their age but we all develop at a different pace. Parents often worry when, for example, one 5-year-old can read fluently while another can barely sound out words on the page. But a lag in one area of development doesn't mean a child has a learning disability [4]. If you think there might be a problem with your child's development, talk to their teacher. A teacher can frame your child's progress in relation to other students in the class or based on their experience. Good teachers are invaluable allies.

References:

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