Back-to-School Anxiety

Welcome Back this school year, we are so excited to have all of our students back and our hallways filled with fun commotion. Though fun for some, not so fun for everyone. Anxious feelings are normal and expected during times of transition or change. This is especially true for children and teens going back to school, or for first-timers starting kindergarten. This transition can be stressful and cause worry about many different school-related issues.

Below are some general strategies parents can use to deal with back-to-school worries.

**Take care of the basics:** Ensure your child is getting enough sleep, eating regular meals and healthy snacks and has daily exercise. When your child’s mind and body are nourished, tackling school worries is easier. Plus, your child will be more likely to listen to you, and cope better when you insist on school attendance, if s/he has had a good nights sleep and a decent breakfast.

**Provide empathy:**Listen to your child’s concerns. *What is s/he worried about? Why does s/he expect that to happen?* Let your child share his/her fears and talk about what’s on his/her mind. There may be good opportunities to simply listen to your child when you are in the car, standing in line at the store, at bath-time or during dinner. For some kids and teens this “casual” method of talking feels less intense and makes it easier for them to express themselves. For others, a private time with undivided attention feels better.

**Problem solve:**Once you know what’s bothering your child, you can start to develop a coping plan. Addressing your child’s fear head on, by creating an active plan with concrete solutions, will significantly reduce the worry. For example, “*If (the worst) happens, what could you do?*” or “*Let’s think of some ways you could handle that situation*.” This gives you the opportunity to coach your child on how to cope with (and interpret) both real and imagined scary situations.

**Focus on the positive aspects:**Once you have an understanding of what your child is afraid of, and a coping plan to address these fears, you can encourage your child to re-direct attention away from the worries towards the positives. Ask your child, "*What are three things that you are most excited about on your first day of school?*" Most kids can think of *something* good, even if it's just eating a special snack or going home at the end of the day. Chances are the fun aspects are simply getting overlooked by repetitive worries.  

**Pay attention to your own behavior:**For parents of younger children or children starting at a new school, it can be anxiety-provoking for parents to hand over care and responsibility of their child to teachers, which is totally understanble. Children take cues from their parents, so the more confidence and calm you can model, the more your child will believe s/he can handle this new hurdle. Be supportive yet firm. When saying goodbye in the morning, say it cheerfully – once! Ensure you don’t reward your child’s protests, crying, or tantrums by allowing him/her to stay home. Instead, in a calm tone, say: *“I can see that going to school is making you scared, but you still have to go. Tell me what you are worried about, so we can talk about it.”*  

Although it is normal for your child to have worries, **it is crucial to have your child attend school.** Skipping school will only increase your child’s fears because s/he never gets a chance to find out if his/her worries are valid.

*Coping with Back to school anxiety. https://www.anxietybc.com/parenting/coping-back-school-anxiety.*

If you have any questions or concern, please do not hesitate to contact your counselor, Mrs. Pardo (*3rd – 6th grade*) x43242 or Mrs. Betts (*Kindergarten – 2nd*) x43243.