

GETTING BACK TO... NOT QUITE NORMAL YET

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Change is Stressful

All change is stressful, even good change. The return to school involves a lot of change even in the best of times. This is especially true for students who are starting school for the first time, those who are transitioning from elementary to middle school or from middle school to high school, or students who are new to the school they will be attending this fall. One way to help children cope with change is to view it as both a challenge and an opportunity. Talk about what is the same and what is different. Acknowledge what might be difficult and plan strategies for coping. Identify new opportunities that arise because things are different and plan ways to make the most of those opportunities.

Expect Behavior Change

Be prepared to see your child behaving in ways that aren't usual for them. Keep in mind that behavior always communicates a message. Try to figure out what need the child is trying to meet through that behavior and then help the child to identify a more appropriate way to meet that need. Responding to the need rather than the behavior will help to avoid unwanted meltdowns and power struggles.

HELPING YOUR CHILDREN PREPARE TO RETURN TO SCHOOL

The past year has been stressful for everyone. As students prepare to head back to school (or for some, to head to school for the first time), it is important to keep in mind that students are not all starting out in the same place. At the end of the last school year, some students were in their school building full time, some were attending classes virtually, and some were doing a hybrid mix of both in-person and virtual learning. Regardless of what the situation was for the last school year, all students want to start this year off on the right track. There is a lot that parents can do to help.

Express Emotions

Little kids often have a hard time expressing big emotions. They may be feeling something that is unfamiliar and the emotions themselves might be scary. Older children and teens may have ideas of what they are supposed to be feeling and struggle if their experience doesn't match up to that expectation. It is important to help young people identify what they're feeling, to let them know that whatever they are feeling is OK, and to help them find an appropriate outlet for expressing those emotions.

Practice Self-Care

You can't take proper care of your children if you aren't taking proper care of yourself. Your children need and deserve parents who are healthy and mentally present. Make sure you are getting enough sleep, eating healthy and getting exercise. Children pick up on the mental and emotional states of their parents. The calmer and more positive you are about going back to school, the better your children will feel about it.



Talk about Different Things

Research on positive childhood experiences has found that children whose parents talk with them about their feelings and are supportive during difficult times tend to be happier and healthier as adults. When you have conversations with your child about difficult things you are better able to gauge your child's level of understanding and correct any misinformation they may have collected or faulty conclusions they may have made. You also create an opportunity to explain your perspective about the situation and any plans or expectations you have for responding to the situation.

Structure & Routines

As we adapt to changing circumstances, structure and routine give us a sense of control, alleviate some of the stress and give our minds a much-needed break. Structure grounds us by providing understanding of what's next and helps us to organize what we are doing from moment to moment. Routines anchor us by providing a degree of predictability, and a comforting mental break for our brains. We feel safe when we know the expectations and rules. Children not only need structure and routine, they thrive on them.

Get Information

Check in with your child's school to get updates about new policies and procedures. Share this information with your children to help them get an idea of what to expect. Help them understand that things may change as conditions change and in accordance with state and health department guidance.



Professional Help

If you find that you are having emotional distress that doesn't go away and that the strategies you're using to cope just aren't enough, reach out for professional help. Talk to your school counselor about helping you to connect with a therapist. Call Child & Adolescent Behavioral Health at 330-433-6075 to schedule an appointment to speak with professional behavioral health clinician. If you or someone you know is thinking that life isn't worth living, help is available any time, day or night.

Call the National Suicide Lifeline at 800-273-8255

Text 4HOPE to 741-741

Call the Crisis Center at 330-452-6000



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