

- Education

## 8 ways to handle the back-to-school stress

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There are three kinds of school students: those who get stressed out at the prospect of going back to school after the long summer holiday; those who can't wait to go back to school because they have had enough of home; and those amazing children who couldn't care less.



The transition back to class after weeks of summer fun can be a stressful time for children and parents alike. Stress is primarily related to anticipation and fear of the unknown: “What will my teacher be like?” “Who will I be sitting next to?” “Will the work be really hard this year?” Things may be especially challenging for students who have just moved to a new school or neighbourhood, so don't have friends in the area.

Some children have trouble going to bed early at the start of the school year. Others may experience a decreased appetite. Worst case scenarios include depression and irritability. Usually, the back to school stress is short lived; once the school routine kicks in and children become accustomed to their new environment and friendships, worries disappear. In either case, with planning and the right attitude, back to school doesn't have to be too hard. Here are tips to help your child cope.

### 1. Identify the cause

Pay attention to be able to recognise school-related anxiety in your child. If your child is complaining about not wanting to go to school or having difficulty doing their work, figure out the root of the problem. Is it a teacher issue? A bully? Are they over worked?

### 2. Don't spread the stress

Parents are the culprits sometimes. If you're worried, fumbling and rushing around, your child will pick up on your stress. So as you get closer to the first day of school, try to have a

calm environment at home.

Stock up on stationery supplies and ingredients for school lunches, and make sure there are enough sets of uniforms. Being organised will take a big load off your shoulders. According to Psychology Today, “Children look to adults for reassurance, so it’s important for parents and caregivers to be aware of their own feelings and limitations, and to remain composed.”

### 3. Retail therapy for kids

Make a list of everything the children will require before school begins. The very thought of going back to school with new backpacks, new stationery and cool new lunch boxes will get kids excited about starting the new school year.

### 4. Talk to other families

It is a fact that misery seeks comfort. If you and your children know that other families are sailing in the same boat of worries, it’ll feel like you are all in this together. These days with kids connected to each other 24/7 via social media, it’s easier to organise a meeting – at home or online – so families can discuss what sort of worries and fears they are harbouring.

### 5. Seeking out friends

Kids haven’t seen most of the students in their year group for weeks so it can worry them that they might not fit back into their friend groups. If your child isn’t in the same class as their close friends, tell them to arrange a spot to meet up during breaks.

### 6. Get back to routine

Children cope better with change and challenging situations when their time is structured. In the last couple of weeks before school reopens, get the children to bed earlier; no more late nights, or unlimited TV, internet and playtime. They might complain at first, but it’ll benefit them in the long run. Equally important is to wake up as close as you normally do on school days. It’s important to ease into it because if you do it cold turkey, it will be a pain.

### 7. Do a dry run

Walking the route to school a few times can do amazing things. Some schools are open a few days before the first day and you can walk into your child’s designated classroom. Once a child gets a feel of their school environment, they will find it less intimidating. Even if the classrooms are closed, just visiting the school grounds can be reassuring.

### 8. Never underestimate your child’s issues

Some shyness or worry about schedules, schoolwork or friends is natural during the back-to-school transition, but ongoing withdrawal or worries may signal a problem. According to psychology experts from the Johns Hopkins Children’s Center, if a child’s anxiety is causing a great deal of distress in their daily life, or if getting along with family members or friends becomes difficult, normal activities in and outside of school are avoided, or there are physical symptoms like stomach aches or fatigue, these ‘red flags’ indicate that the child’s anxiety should be evaluated by a child psychologist or psychiatrist.