

Going back to school after summer vacation can be tough for kids, especially those who are anxious to start with or who find change difficult to handle. Here are some pointers for helping kids manage fears and get a good start in the new school year.

- 1. Get back into the routine.** A few days before school starts, kids should be eased into going to bed and waking up on their school schedule, and screens should be off at least an hour before bed time, to help them fall asleep. Shopping for school supplies early helps prime kids for their return to the classroom.
- 2. Let your child make decisions.** Since going to school isn't optional, giving kids choices about small things—what to wear, what to eat for breakfast, what book bag to take—can help them feel more in control.
- 3. Remember to refuel.** Make sure your child is eating breakfast every morning. Be aware of what she is eating for lunches and snacks while she is at school. You don't want her to wait to eat until she's ravenous and cranky.
- 4. Talk about fears and feelings.** Give him a chance to express his anxieties about his new teacher or whether his friends will be in his class. Don't reassure him that everything will be fine, or tell him not to worry. Validate his feelings but let him know you're confident that he can handle it.
- 5. Don't share your anxieties.** When parents ask, "Did you make any friends?" it can be shaming for a child who is struggling to fit in. Instead, ask neutral questions: "Tell me three things you liked/didn't like about your day."
- 6. Have a trial run.** If your child is starting at a new school, walk through the school building with her before school starts to help her get acquainted with sights, smells, and sounds. Mapping out classrooms and finding lockers in advance can help an older child, and for younger kids it can be helpful to meet the new teacher.
- 7. Role-play.** Making a plan for dealing with anxiety-inducing situations can help kids feel confident about coping with them when they arise. Have your child act out the part of a strict teacher or bullying classmate, and help her model an appropriate response.
- 8. Remember the positive.** Worries aside, the start of school is exciting, and most kids can think of things they're looking forward to, whether it's seeing friends, new activities, playing sports, or new clothes.
- 9. Don't expect smooth sailing.** If you anticipate some ups and downs as your child settles into school, and show that you're not rattled, he will have more confidence and be better able to overcome setbacks.
- 10. Help kids manage their commitments.** The first weeks of school are slow in terms of work, and kids often take on extracurriculars that become overwhelming later. Encourage your child to wait on new activities until mid-October, and leave time for adjustment.

