

Reduce Back-to-School Anxiety

Whether your child is starting Kindergarten or her senior year of High School, there's a certain amount of anxiety and stress that comes with returning to school after three months of summer vacation.

Your child is used to lots of time outdoors, a relaxed schedule, no homework and a fairly stress-free environment. Suddenly he is faced with many stressors both academic (Who will my teacher be? Will I be able to keep up with the other kids? Will I forget everything I learned last year?) and social (who will be in my class? Will I have the right clothes? Will I make the team? Will my friends still like me? Will I make friends at my new school?)

There are many things parents can do to help make this transition easier for their children - and for themselves.

Be aware that it could be an issue.

Back to school time affects the entire family. Remember that everyone will be a bit out of sorts for a while, including yourself! So take it easy and try not to let things get to you. But also remember it's only temporary and within a few weeks the school year schedule will feel normal.

Don't mistake anxiety for excitement.

Yes, your kid may act like she is excited to go back to school but don't assume that means she's not anxious. Recognize the signs of stress in your child; changes in eating habits, not sleeping, and acting up all may be signs that your child is worried about the upcoming changes.

Don't wait for your child to express his worries.

Your child may not proactively share with you what he feels anxious about. Make it a point to discuss heading back to school and review both the exciting things and the things that may be a little scary. Chances are, he will open up and you can address his specific concerns.

Offer as much assurance as possible.

Even if your child denies being worried, continue to offer as much assurance about the upcoming year and all of the things that go along with it.

Make going back to school a celebration.

Create excitement about going back to school. Have a special weekend or night out the evening before and discuss all of the fun things to look forward to for the year. Talk about the positive things that happened over the summer and encourage your child to share these experiences with her classmates.

Lowenstein & Associates

691 South Fifth Street • Columbus, Ohio 43206
(614) 443-6155

Don't make promises you can't keep.

When addressing your child's fears, make sure to be realistic about what you can promise him. For example, don't tell your child you will change his classroom if he doesn't like it if you won't be able to follow through on that promise. It's best to simply say, "I will do my best to address any problems you have," and then manage them on a case-by-case basis when and if problems do arise.

Follow the school's lead

Your child's teachers are trained to know how to ease kids back into schoolwork. Follow their lead when it comes to how much or how little homework your child is doing for the first few weeks. Most likely they will start light and ease the kids back into a full load. If you are concerned about too little or too much homework, ask your child's teacher about his or her strategy.

Dr. Lowenstein is a Psychologist with over 25 years of clinical experience in his private practice in Columbus, OH. He specializes in individual, family and group therapy with children and adolescents. Dr. Lowenstein provides expert testimony around the country relating to adolescent and adult psychopathology and is a frequent guest on radio and television and as a resource for print media.