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# 7 Tips for Overcoming Back to School Anxiety

**Andrew Rosen, PhD, ABPP, FAACP**

Another school year has come around and with it, the possibility of extreme fear and separation anxiety for some children. Although it's normal for any kid to have a certain degree of back-to-school anxiety, there is a huge difference between a child who is nervous about the new school year and one whose anxiety is severe enough to seek professional care.

Kids often worry about things like fitting in or whether the teacher will pick on them, which increases their stress. In the week leading up to the beginning of the school year or in the last few days before the end of a school break, younger kids may show some separation anxiety by crying frequently, throwing temper tantrums, or being more clingy than usual. Older children's school anxiety symptoms can include being moody or irritable, complaining of headaches or stomach aches, or withdrawing into themselves. So how can a parent tell if their child just has school jitters or if they truly have back to school anxiety?

Fears about new teachers, harder schoolwork, and being away from their parents are common for kids and usually stop within a couple of weeks once the child settles into the routine of the new school year. For those children whose anxiety symptoms continue beyond the first four or five weeks of school or seem extreme or inappropriate for their developmental level, a consultation with a therapist may be in order.

## Tips to Ease School Fears

If your child is worried about the new school year, these back-to-school anxiety tips can help:

1. Help your child identify what it is they are worrying about. Assure them that it's normal to have fears. Give them your full attention and be sure to set a regular time and place to talk to them about their concerns. For example, bath time might be a good time to talk to a younger child, while a teen might be more receptive later in the evening.
2. Focus on the positives: In order to redirect your child's attention from their worries, ask them to tell you a couple of things that are positive about school. Generally, even the most nervous child can think of something they like about it. Maybe they have a new friend or enjoy a certain subject or look forward to working on an art project. Looking for the positives can make the negatives seem a little less overwhelming.
3. Don't pacify the child, instead coach them to come up with ways to solve their problem. Telling your child that "things will be okay" doesn't help them get past their fears. What does is giving them some control. Encourage the child to give you some ideas of ways they can deal with what's concerning them. This type of problem-solving helps them learn coping skills and teaches them critical thinking so they can develop a plan instead of simply reacting negatively.
4. Try role-playing. Going through a particular scenario can often help your child feel confident. Let the child be the "bad guy" teacher or scary bully, while you play the part of the child. Your responses can help them learn how to deal with the situation appropriately and allow them to respond with less fear.
5. Reinforce positive behaviors and reward their successes and their bravery in facing what they fear.
6. Be supportive, but don't allow them to stay home from school. Even though it is normal for your child to worry about going to school, it is crucial that they attend. Allowing them to avoid school only increases and reinforces their fears. The longer they stay out of school the harder it can be for them to go back.
7. Seek professional help for back-to-school anxiety that gets worse or lasts more than about four weeks. Additionally, medication is sometimes appropriate in severe cases of separation anxiety.

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