



GET PSYCHED!

Psychological Services Dept. | Volume 3 | September 9, 2020

Tips for Helping Your Child Cope with Back-to-School Anxiety

1. **Be aware of your own anxieties and how you respond to them.** When you display anxious thoughts and/or body language this will stir up anxiety in your child as well. They will follow your lead. If you are calm, they will more likely be calm.
2. **Be available/present.** As caregivers, the best thing you can do is be available to answer their questions and correct any misconceptions. We are living in a time of change and uncertainty. Being honest and sharing information in developmentally appropriate ways is important. If you are unsure how to do this, ask a mental health professional.
3. **Acknowledge their emotions.** Kids do not always know how to process their emotions well, especially younger children. Their feelings may be coming out in ways that you don't fully understand (e.g., irritability, indecisiveness, meltdowns, avoidance, withdrawal, physical complaints, etc.). Caregivers can help them process these emotions by giving them the words to describe how they are feeling. For example, "I see you are upset. Is it because you aren't in the same class as your friend?" Then normalize their emotions. "I understand why you are sad because Sam has always been a good friend and you have always enjoyed being in his class." This not only helps give them some language to use, but also makes them feel understood.
4. **Implement routine as much as possible.** Whether your child is learning at home or at school, predictable routines help decrease anxiety. For instance, as much as possible, keep bedtimes and wake times consistent.
5. **Shine a spotlight on what is still within your child's control.** Identify areas, together with your child, where they still have some control. This will help to prevent feelings of helplessness. It may be as simple as your child choosing what to wear for the day, making food choices for their lunch, and choosing which song they'd like to sing during their 20-second hand washing.
6. **Limit exposure to the news.** Too much news can increase anxiety. This doesn't mean you shouldn't listen to the news. It just means we need to limit it. Not only is this healthy for you, but also for those little ears that may be overhearing.
7. **Get Active.** Physical activity is VERY important for your mental well-being. Encourage your children to get active in fun ways. Add this into your family schedule and whenever possible make it fun.
8. **Model self-care for your children.** Get active yourself. Set time to do things for yourself and let your children see this. Not only will this benefit you, but it also will help to model the importance of self-care for your children. Remember, you cannot take care of your children if you are not first taking care of yourself. This is a hard one to find time for, but it is so important.
9. **Consult with school supports!** Your school has many mental health professionals including psychologists, psychological associates, and mental health workers. Talk to your child's teacher, core resource teacher or principal to ask how to get a referral to these supports.
10. **Practice Self-Compassion.** Be kind to yourself. Parenting is challenging. None of us have it "all together."
11. **Keep your faith.** Some may find it helpful to draw on their faith for strength. Personal time for prayer, reflection, or meditation may provide an outlet for coping.



*If you notice increasing and consistent negative mood/behaviours, please discuss with a pediatrician or mental health professional.

Sources: <https://cmho.org/six-tips-to-support-your-childs-mental-wellness/>, <https://www.fcpediatrics.com/5-tips-to-prepare-for-back-to-school-during-covid-19/>, <http://centralontariopsych.ca/our-blog/parenting-during-covid-19-some-tips-to-support-our-childrens-emotional-well-being>, Anxious Kids, Anxious Parents: 7 Ways to Stop the Worry Cycle and Raise Courageous and Independent Children by Lynn Lyons/Reid Wilson



Easing the transition for kids with ADHD

Students who have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) may be particularly challenged with return to school. In addition to their pre-pandemic learning challenges, the very skills challenged by this new pandemic environment are the ones typically impaired by these conditions, such as the regulation of attention, activity, impulse, behaviour and emotion, planning, organization, and social interaction. As a result, these students may experience a greater impact on their mental health.

1. What can you do to assist your child transition into this challenging environment?

- **Routine is important** for most of us, especially children with learning needs. Review how their environment will be the same and different this year.
- **Discuss their worries.**
- **Review any added rules** they will be expected to follow. Do they anticipate difficulties? Do you?
- Find ways to review new rules often; **practice and role play different scenarios** that you and they anticipate will be difficult.
- **Teach your child how to express when they are struggling** to help prevent a meltdown (e.g., “I’m having a hard time right now” or “I need to get up and move”).
- Have them **practice wearing a mask** and/or see family members in masks.
- **Focus on your child’s strengths.** Make a list together of things they are good at. Remind them they still have all these skills and strengths to apply as they return to a (new) school environment.
- Have them **identify a teacher** they can share any concerns with at school, **and a good friend** they can play/spend time with.

2. Prepare the school

- If needed, **write a note to the teacher** or schedule a virtual meeting with the school to inform them of: (a) potential issues; (b) triggers; (c) helpful strategies at home; (d) possible strategies at school.

3. Investigate options for external support if needed.

Adapted from: <http://caddacbloq.ca/?p=1171>

Feeling Anxious about Masks?

If your child is required to wear a mask, it may conjure up feelings of anxiety. Among the concerns, parents may be anxious about the number of masks they should keep in stock and send to school, whether their child will be able to adhere to mask hygiene rules, the possible psychological and social effects of wearing masks, and mask stigma, which may be more of a concern with older children and adolescents.

It may help to keep in mind the following:

1. **Practice, practice, practice!** You can practice wearing masks together as a family, especially when doing fun activities. This way, they will associate wearing masks with something fun. Also, try to find masks your children like wearing, are comfortable with, and fit properly. Review basic mask hygiene.
2. The school will teach how to wear masks and mask hygiene.
3. Students will have mask breaks during their day.
4. **Mask-wearing habits will improve over time.**
5. Wearing masks appropriately even some of the time may reduce risk during that time.
6. Be mindful not to project your fears onto your children. **Use calm and reassuring language when discussing masks.** Ask your child if they have any questions about masks and going back to school.
7. Our school system encourages and fosters positive learning environments, showing no tolerance for bullying. Children are human and make mistakes and may display mean behaviour with respect to mask-wearing. This may be disheartening. If any situation like this arises, please discuss with the school administrator.
8. **Children are resilient and will be happy returning to school** to play and spend time with their peers/friends (masks, or no masks).

What to do when your child doesn’t like wearing masks?

1. **Acknowledge and explore big, uncomfortable feelings** so that they may understand their narrative, e.g., “Masks are uncomfortable and I don’t like them”.
2. **Meet their feelings with empathy and understanding.**
3. **Continue to help them develop their narrative**, “We are taking this precaution for the very important reason of preventing the spread of COVID-19. We are caring for those most vulnerable. Let’s figure out some ways to make wearing masks as comfortable as we can.”
4. **Explore ways to increase comfort.** For example, finding or ordering more comfortable masks, or playful patterns and characters.

Source: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/parents-back-to-school-mandatory-mask-challenges-1.5693088>

Resources:



https://twitter.com/YCDSB_MH

1-855-310-COPE (2673)

Call / text a crisis worker

[Link to the YCDSB Community Resource List](#)