

## Back to school anxiety



The start of the new school year is always exciting for most teenagers. However, it can also induce some anxiety. For kids that are usually easy-going or extroverted, the beginning of an academic year is filled with joy and excitement, in parallel to those who are prone to anxiety and get more nervous than usual. Moreover, kids who usually have difficulty separating from their caregivers will experience anxiety during those times of transition.

The start of school may be particularly difficult for kids who are entering a transition year, such as middle school or to a new school. Stress may also increase if there's a change in your child's social support system (e.g. a good friend has left the school).

For most teens, these "start of new school year" worries will vanish and behaviors that accompanied the anxiety will be short-term. The main objective for parents is to be supportive without worsening the kids' concerns.

Here are a few strategies for helping anxious teens have a smooth transition back to school.

### **"Take your own temperature"**

The beginning of an academic year could be inducing anxiety for parents too. Having to reestablish routines after a long summer break, as well as, rearranging extracurricular activities could be very pressuring. Accordingly, it is highly recommended to avoid projecting your stress onto your children.

In order to do so, having a "family meeting" discussing the former is a way to avoid increasing that stress.

The following topics that are recommended to be discussed:

- Homework time
- Screen time
- Extracurricular activities
- Responsibilities in the household
- Rules and consequences

### **Listen to your child**

When your child expresses worries about going back to school, do listen carefully. Contradicting or dismissing these fears (e.g. "You shouldn't feel anxious!") will only exacerbate the

anxiety they are facing. On the other hand, listening to them and validating their feelings will help them feel more secure. In addition, helping your child arrange for situations they are worried about will boost their self-esteem and significantly reduce their anxiety.

However, kids often just want to vent about what's upsetting them and in return they expect validation of their feeling (e.g. "I understand that it is difficult").

### **Tummy-aches and headaches**

Children often complain about headaches and stomachaches in the morning which can be triggered by anxiety. In these situations, it is recommended that you make them go to school. However, if your child develops a pattern of these symptoms, it is essential to get your child checked out by a doctor to rule out any medical problem.

In the context where the symptoms persist, it might be an underlying school problem. When faced with such a situation, the most effective thing to do as a parent is to send your child to school anyway. Allowing a child to avoid situations that trigger anxiety only will reinforce their fears.

Investigating the underlying cause(s) of the anxiety your child is facing is also a must. For example:

- A child with separation anxiety may be worried something will happen their caregiver if they're apart;
- A child that is facing bullying may be afraid to go to school;
- A child with an undiagnosed learning disorder might be avoiding embarrassment.

### **Let a staff member know**

Staff members are always available to help a student needing support to allow a successful and smooth transition (e.g. school counselor, a teacher, head of MYP).

It is important that staff members are alert of those situations to make sure to assist the student through these worries and avoid the development of these negative feelings towards the school environment.