

Mental Health Matters

August 2022



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Supporting Students Facing Trauma

Going back to school after the summer often comes with some anxiety and stress, but this year students will likely need a lot more support, reassurance, and comfort before they'll be able to learn. Most children are dealing with some level of trauma after the uncertainty of the past two school years – trauma can occur after anything bad happens that makes the individual feel unsafe or scared. Even families who haven't faced the loss of loved ones, financial stress, or trouble at home have had their sense of safety and security disrupted. This has an especially strong impact on children, as their brains are still developing.

You can help young people move forward despite trauma – use your classroom to create situations in which they have choices, control, and feel empowered.

PRIORITIZE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SAFETY IN SCHOOLS AND CLASSROOMS.

Trauma is really tough on the brain – it's likely that students won't feel like their normal selves. The mind and body have to feel safe to reverse the impact of trauma and feel "normal" again – students can't effectively learn without those basic needs met first. Children often don't have the coping skills needed to handle trauma on their own, so creating this safe environment is crucial to their healing, and thus classroom behavior and learning potential.

Ways you can do this:

Be open about your own feelings. If you're having a bad day, ask if they ever have days when it seems like nothing goes right. Ask for their patience on your off days – it shows them that when one of us is down, the rest can help out and make things easier. It can also encourage them to tell you upfront if they're having a difficult day so you can be prepared to support them.

Model empathy and active listening. Many times, kids just need to feel heard and seen. Don't dismiss their concerns or tell them not to worry – take what they share with you seriously and thank them for being open with you.

BUILD A STRONG CLASSROOM COMMUNITY.

For students coming in with trauma and anxiety, giving them some control is one of the best things you can do to help them feel more at ease. Many children have gone through similar experiences but felt alone in it, especially given the isolation that came with COVID-19. It's important to help them rebuild social connections and support – peer relationships are crucial for social development. Feeling like part of a classroom team makes school a much more positive environment and holds children accountable to someone other than authority figures.

Full article found at <https://mhanational.org/supporting-students-facing-trauma>





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In case of an Emergency:

- **911 For Immediate Support**
- **Ventura County Crisis Team (866) 998-2243 –(24 hours)**

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#ENDTHESTIGMA

Helping Kids When They Worry

As kids grow, they face many new things. Starting school. Meeting new friends. Learning to swim. Competing in sports. Learning to drive. Each new thing can feel like a big step forward.

When kids and teens face new things, they often feel a mix of emotions. Facing something new — even when it's a good thing — can be stressful. It's natural to feel excited about what's ahead — and to worry about whether they're ready to handle it.

Worry isn't all bad. It can be helpful as long as it doesn't last too long, become too intense, or happen too often.

Worry is a caution signal. It's a natural response to a big event, change, or challenge. Worry is a way of thinking and feeling ahead: "Am I ready for this? What's going to happen? Is it safe to go ahead? What do I need to do to get ready? How will I do it? What if I feel nervous?"

Thinking through the part they worry about — calmly and with support from parents — can help kids get ready for what's ahead. When kids feel prepared, they can focus on the part they're looking forward to.

How Adults Can Help

Sometimes kids avoid things that feel new or challenging. But doing new things (that are safe and right for their age) helps kids grow. With each new challenge they can gain skills and confidence.

Parents can help kids and teens face new things without letting worry hold them back. Here's how:

Spend time with them. Do this every day, even if it's just a few minutes. Do things together that you both enjoy. Go for a walk, cook, eat, play — or just hang out. Find ways to smile and laugh together. This keeps the bond between you strong and positive. And it creates moments for kids to open up naturally.

Ask what's on their minds. Help kids label what they think and feel. They might not always have a lot to say. And they might not always want to talk about what's on their minds. But let kids know you're open to listening and talking any time.

Listen with patience. When kids and teens want to talk, listen with your full attention. Give them time to put their thoughts and feelings into words. Ask questions to hear more. Don't be too quick to give advice. Let them confide. Listen calmly to what they have to say.

Validate. Let kids know you understand. Say it's okay to feel how they feel. Tell them their feelings are normal. Try not to say, "There's nothing to worry about." This can make kids think they shouldn't feel the way they do. Instead, listen calmly and accept how they feel. That makes it easier for kids to share.

Full article found at <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/worrying.html#catfeelings>