## WHEN BIG FEELINGS SHOW UP IN THE BODY

Helping Your Child Work Through Tough School Mornings

Sometimes worries about school don't sound like, “I'm anxious.”

Instead, children may say:

- “My stomach hurts.”
- “I have a headache.”
- “I feel sick.”
- “I'm so tired.”
- “I don't feel good.”
- “I'm shaking, I feel scared.”
- “Something feels wrong.”

Physical complaints can be very real, even when stress or worry may be contributing. The goal is not to dismiss the complaint, but to help your child learn how to respond to uncomfortable feelings while keeping school as the expectation.

### BELIEVE THEM WITHOUT FEEDING THE WORRY

Start by acknowledging how they feel.

Try:

- “I hear you. Your body doesn't feel good right now.”

Then move toward coping rather than spending a long time discussing the symptom.

- “Let's take care of your body and figure out what you need to get ready for school.”

### KEEP THE EXPECTATION CONSISTENT

A child can feel uncomfortable, worried, or upset and still go to school.

Try:

- “You don't have to feel great about school this morning. You just need to take the next step.”

Avoid making staying home the automatic answer whenever a physical complaint comes up, when your child is otherwise well enough to attend.

### TOUGH MORNING? KEEP IT SIMPLE.

1. Acknowledge: “I know you're not feeling your best.”
2. Check: Determine whether there are signs your child is actually ill and follow your family's usual health guidelines.
3. Regulate: Try a few slow breaths, a drink of water, a quick stretch, or another familiar coping strategy.
4. Keep Moving:Focus on the next step, not the entire school day.

Get dressed → Eat → Brush teeth → Grab backpack → Go

### CHANGE THE CONVERSATION

- “I don't feel good. I can't go.”

→ “Let's see what your body needs. Then we'll take the next step.”

- “I feel sick when I think about school.”

→ “Sometimes worry can make our bodies feel uncomfortable. You can handle that feeling.”

- “I don't think I can do today.”

→ “You don't have to figure out the whole day right now. Let's just get through the morning.”

- “I don't want to go.”

→ “I know. You can feel that way and still go.”

## WHAT CHILDREN NEED TO LEARN

**Feelings are not emergencies.**

A worried body can feel uncomfortable without meaning something is wrong.

**Discomfort does not always mean "stop."**

Sometimes we can feel uncomfortable and keep going.

**We can handle hard things.**

Children build confidence when they experience, "I was worried, and I did it anyway."

## THE MESSAGE TO REPEAT

"I believe you. I know this feels hard. We can take care of your body, use your coping tools, and take it one step at a time."

The goal isn't to eliminate every uncomfortable feeling before school. The goal is to help your child learn that they can feel it, cope with it, and keep going.

If physical complaints are frequent, severe, occur outside of school-related situations, or you are concerned about your child's health, talk with your child's pediatrician.

## WHEN YOUR CHILD'S WORRY BECOMES YOUR WORRY

It can be hard to watch your child struggle, especially when they are crying, complaining of not feeling well, or saying they don't want to go to school. As a parent, you may begin to feel worried or unsure, too.Children often look to adults for cues about how serious or scary a situation is. Your calm response can help your child feel more confident that they can handle the situation.

If you notice yourself feeling worried, you can:

- **Pause before responding.** Take a breath and remind yourself that your child's feelings are real, but you do not have to solve the feeling immediately.
- **Keep your voice and body calm.** A calm tone can communicate, "This is hard, but we can handle it."
- **Avoid adding to the worry.** Try not to repeatedly ask about symptoms, discuss everything that could go wrong at school, or show a lot of alarm when your child expresses worry.
- **Use confident language.** Instead of: "Oh no, you don't feel good? Maybe you shouldn't go."

Try: "I know you're not feeling your best. Let's take care of what you need and take the morning one step at a time."

- **Take care of your own feelings.** If you feel overwhelmed, give yourself a moment to breathe, reset, and respond calmly. You don't have to have the perfect response—you just want to show your child that big feelings can be handled.

**Remember:**

**Your child can borrow your calm.**

When you stay calm, supportive, and confident, you are teaching your child:

- "My feelings are okay. My parent believes I can handle them. I can do hard things even when I don't feel comfortable."