

Back to School: Excitement and Anxiety

As kids and parents anticipate the start of a new school year, it is common to feel both excitement and concern. While it's easy to focus on the material aspects of getting ready for school – new clothes and school supplies – the emotional issues need attention as well. Whether a child is starting preschool, middle school or even college, parents play a key role in helping their child prepare to get the year off to a good start.

I. Common concerns at different ages

- Pre-school & kindergarten concerns
 - Separation anxiety
 - Worries about routines (foods, going to the bathroom, needing help)
 - Concerns about what the teacher(s) and other kids will be like
- Elementary-age concerns
 - Anxiety about academic performance
 - Worries about peer relations (rejection, teasing, bullying)
 - Special concerns about race relations, political divisiveness, in light of recent events in the news
- Middle school concerns
 - Anxiety about managing multiple classes (finding way around building, organizing work demands)
 - Worries about peer relations (even more intense than in elementary school)
- High school concerns
 - Same as middle school, but with increasing pressure to succeed
 - Worries about identity, life plans, choosing higher education
 - Emerging concerns about dating, sexuality, romantic relationships

II. Ways parents can help

- Listen to your child & take feelings seriously
(Ask: what are you looking forward to? What are you worried about? Share stories from your own childhood to normalize the concerns, also acknowledging that the world is different now.)
- Visit the building during teacher prep week
- Connect with other kids who will be in the same class
Arrange play dates for younger kids; consider throwing a back-to-school party for older kids; build on connections child already has through sports, faith community, other activities
- Role-play how to deal with tough situations
Brainstorm how to respond to teasing – even silly ideas, make it fun; coach child on how to deal with bullying and assure child you will contact teachers and principal immediately if you hear of bullying
- Connect with other parents and teachers to promote a school culture of acceptance and respect