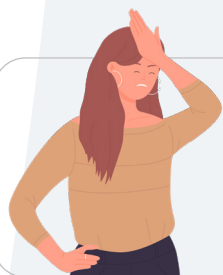


Back to School Already?

Helping kids (and adults)
ease into new routines



READER'S NOTE: Even though this newsletter is parenting focused, the tips for navigating anxiety and change are universal.

As summer begins to fade and the school year rapidly approaches, a flurry of emotions can envelop parents and children alike. Usually, it's a mix of excitement and anxiety.

The kids may look forward to seeing friends but worry about homework and exams or fitting in with new classmates. Parents might look forward to a quieter household, but dread enforcing earlier sleep and wake times and bundling everyone out the door for multi-stop morning commutes.

Hello Anxiety. Welcome to the Pool Party

Back-to-school signals the end of fun, unstructured days at the pool or movie matinees. No matter how you spend your summers, the start of the

fall semester disrupts a comfortable routine, and that kind of change is a drag.

Even kids who like school may feel anxious or uncertain—particularly during transition years, like the start of kindergarten, middle school, or high school.

This kind of anxiety can:



Degrade concentration, appetite, and sleep.



Cause irritability, anxiety, sadness or even depression.



Manifest physically with headaches, muscle pain, or upset stomach.

Often, the inclination is to distract from these feelings or to avoid or delay thinking about the pending change. But, you can better help your kids, and yourself, transition into any new situation by [leaning into it](#) and developing a structured approach.

Taking a Cue from Retail.

Do you know that thing department stores do where they start pushing the back-to-school sales before vacation has barely started? You just get the kids bundled off to Camp Runamuck for the summer and BAM, your local retailer is pushing scholastic essentials at 50% off.

As annoying as that can be, there is wisdom in getting ahead of the back-to-school crunch. A structured plan can significantly ease anxiety around the sunshine-to-studies transition.

Dive into this list while you're chilling at the pool or beach mid-summer to help map out a smooth, successful return to the classroom.



Prepare to Prepare – Build your game plan for easing children into change well ahead of time. Make a checklist and budget for activities, routine changes, and materials (clothing/uniforms, school supplies) you'll need for the transition. Create a digital calendar with set dates and activities to start prepping for the big first day.



Use Visuals – Make a physical version of your preparation calendar with your kids and place it centrally in your home. With younger ones, treat it like a craft project with colorful markers, cutouts, and stickers to highlight set dates to help your child anticipate how and when routines will shift.



Incorporate Cues – Include positive and fun back-to-school countdown milestones in your calendar. Set times ahead for shopping for new clothes and school supplies. Plan a special meal or mini celebration the evening before you start adopting earlier bedtimes or more structured routines. Pepper fun family activities in between the back-to-school milestones to make the most of the remaining summer break.



Visit Ahead – Taking children to school before it gets crowded and noisy can help introduce them to the environment in a calmer and more controlled way. For kids who are particularly anxious, contact school administration to see if an early walkthrough or tour is available to visit classrooms and meet instructors. Ask about handing kids off to a buddy or staffer who can help them ease into class on their first day.



Talk It Over – Ask your kids how they're feeling about the new school year. Keep the dialogue positive by asking if they're excited to see new friends or participate in their favorite classes or extracurriculars. Try not to focus on challenges or difficulties that lead them to anxiety but listen and validate their emotions if they go there on their own.



Practice Emotional Regulation – Teaching kids simple, predictable calming routines can help reduce pre-first-day anxiety and build coping skills for overwhelming situations and emotions at school. Example: Take five deep sniff and blow breaths – breathing in deeply through the nose like smelling a flower and breathing a big whoosh out through the mouth like blowing out birthday candles, counting on your fingers as you go. (You can adjust the description as needed for different age groups and point teens and young adults to Concern's online library for other helpful [breathing](#) and [emotion regulating](#) exercises.)

The above steps can be adapted for change prepping at any age or for different situations. Whether approaching a new school year from kindergarten through college, or adult milestones like a new job or a move to a new home or town; mindful planning can help us all become [resilient masters of change](#).

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