



Canadian Mental
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Champlain East
Mental health for all

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pour la santé mentale
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Managing Back to School Anxiety

Going back to school after summer vacation can be a stressful transition for kids and families. It is normal for children and teens to experience anxious feelings as they prepare to return to school, go to a new school or start kindergarten. Worries can include friends: *Will some of my friends be in my class? What if I don't know anyone?*, teachers: *Who will be my new teacher?*, learning: *What if I am not good in math?*, and being away from their parents: *What if I miss you too much during the day?*. If your child feels anxious or worried in the days leading up to the start of school, here are some tips that can be helpful.

The first thing to do to help ease these worries is to talk about this transition to school when your child is in a calm state (avoid times when your child is upset). You could ask: *"Is there anything in particular about this school year that's worrying you?"*, or *"I see that you're anxious about school. How can I help you?"* Then, let your child share their fears and talk about what's on their mind. Showing them that you are listening with empathy to their concerns can be very beneficial.

Once you know your child's worries, you can start to develop a coping plan including solutions, which can significantly reduce anxiety. You could say: *"Let's think of ways we can make going back to school easier for you."* This discussion can be an opportunity to teach your child some coping skills for real or imagined scary situations. You could invite your child to find ways they could handle a specific situation or help them brainstorm practical solutions if the worst scenario happens. When coping strategies are found, show your child that you believe in them and that you are confident that they can use these to handle their challenges.

After a coping plan has been discussed to address your child's worries, you can redirect their attention away from their anxiety towards positive aspects of going back to school. A good way to do this is to ask them: *"What do you like about school?"* or *"What are some things that you are most excited about on your first day of school?"* Most kids can think of good memories from previous years or think of something special they are looking forward to.

Keep in mind that changing to school schedule and routines can be more difficult for some kids and anxiety provoking if it is done last minute. Thus, here are a few recommendations you can follow:

- Gradually move to a school-year schedule a few weeks early, which includes school-day bedtimes routines, wake up times and mealtimes. Take the time to practice these routines so your child is ready to follow them when school starts.



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- Make sure to get everything ready ahead of time with your child (at least one week before), such as buying the school supplies, preparing the school bag and deciding what to wear on the first day of school.
- Involve your child in planning their school lunches for the first week
- If you have a young child starting kindergarten, get them familiar with the school environment by going to the school playground and have them play a few times before the first day of school.
- Find ways to celebrate your child's bravery after the first day or week of school and take the time to listen to all they have experienced.

References:

[Coping with Back to School Anxiety | Blog | Anxiety Canada](#)

[How to help your child manage back-to-school anxiety \(understood.org\)](#)

DO YOU NEED HELP?

Dial or text 2-1-1 for free and confidential service that easily connects people to the critical social and community supports they need.

If you are thinking of suicide, please call 9-8-8 which is a mental health crisis and suicide prevention line.

The information provided is not a substitute for professional advice. If you need advice, please consult a qualified health care professional. For further information or if you want to access our services at CMHA, please call 1-800-493-8271 or visit our website at www.cmha-east.on.ca