

# Emerging Minds Families

## FACT SHEET

# 8 tips to help your child manage back-to-school anxiety

It's normal for children to feel nervous about starting or returning to school. With new teachers and classmates to meet, new environments and routines to get used to, and new skills to learn, each term can bring with it a sense of change and uncertainty.

The good news is, there are lots of things you can do to help your child manage back-to-school anxiety and reduce its impact on their mental health, learning and wellbeing. Get started with these eight tips for helping your child manage back-to-school anxiety:

- 1 Look for [signs your child might be feeling anxious](#)** as each school term approaches. It can be hard to recognise child anxiety, since many of the signs may also be symptoms of physical illness or just a normal part of growing up. But things to look out for include:
  - physical symptoms, such as stomach aches, headaches or nausea
  - trouble sleeping
  - changes in appetite; or
  - changes in behaviour.

[Separation anxiety](#) is common among younger children, while older children and teenagers may have trouble concentrating or seem overly tired or irritable more often. It's also important to be aware of what's happening in your child's social life and look out for [signs their anxiety could be caused by bullying](#).



- 2 Create time and space to talk with your child about what's on their mind.** Even a couple of minutes in the car on your way to/from somewhere can help. In fact, if your child doesn't usually like talking about their feelings, sitting side-by-side in the car and not having to make eye contact with you can help them to feel more comfortable.
- 3 Ask open-ended questions** – for example, 'How are you feeling about starting/going back to school?' This gives your child a chance to share their thoughts, feelings and anything that's worrying them.
- 4 Listen closely and acknowledge your child's feelings.** For example, 'I can see why you would be worried about starting in a new class. I know that lots of kids feel anxious about making new friends.' Remember, school is a major part of your child's life, so try to see things from their point of view and don't dismiss their worries, even if they seem small or silly to you.

You don't need to have all the answers or be able to fix things. Instead, the most important thing is that your child believes they can overcome their feelings of anxiety and knows that you're there to help them through it.

- 5 Get organised together.** For younger children, get them involved in organising their school bag ready for the first day. If you can, practise the journey to school and visit the grounds to explore and play on the equipment, so your child is more familiar with their surroundings on their first day.

If you have older children, ask them to help you create a back-to-school checklist, with everything they need to do and have ready for the term ahead. Work together to plan a weekly schedule that they're happy to stick to, with time for homework, play, exercise and relaxation. Any opportunity (even small) for children to make decisions and feel prepared and in control can help ease their anxiety.

- 6 Help your child to come up with a list of ways to manage their anxiety and support them to practise these strategies** both when they're feeling anxious and when they're not.

Physical activity is a great way to burn off excess energy, release tension and feel calmer, so help your child find activities that they enjoy doing. Time outdoors, breathing and [relaxation exercises](#), and unstructured play (where your child makes all the decisions) can also be helpful ways for children and teenagers to calm anxiety. Remember, everyone's experience of anxiety is different, so figuring out which strategies work for your child and family might take some time. Keep encouraging your child to try new things until they find what works for them.

- 7 Find ways to help your child feel excited about going to school.** Talk to children of all ages about some of the fun activities that they'll do at school.

Encourage older children to sign up for teams or extracurricular activities, like a school choir or club, or to make plans to see their friends outside of school. You could even play games on the way to school, or let your child choose the music or radio station and have a sing-along.

Having something to look forward to can help to distract your child from their worries about school.

- 8 Acknowledge your child's efforts and praise them** for doing something they were anxious about. Talk about how they managed their feelings and if possible, be specific in your praise to reinforce the skills and strategies they used. For example, 'I know you were really nervous about starting in Mr Kelly's class today, but I heard you doing your breathing exercises in the car and I'm proud of you for getting through your first day.'



### When to get professional support

With time and support from the people around them, your child's anxiety around going to school should soon start to fade. But if you feel like things aren't improving, or your child's anxiety is affecting their day-to-day life, talk to a trusted professional.

Your child's school may be able to suggest strategies to help them adjust, while your GP can assess your child and talk to you about the types of support available for managing anxiety. Our fact sheet has more information on [how to find the right support for your child](#).

Identifying and addressing back-to-school anxiety early is important for your child's learning, resilience and wellbeing. With your support and care, they can learn to overcome their fears and enjoy everything that school has to offer.

AVAILABLE HERE

**More information on supporting children with anxiety**



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