

## FIVE TIPS FOR A POSITIVE NEW SCHOOL YEAR



The last year and a half had its ups and downs, to say the least. Schools went from open to closed, virtual learning to in-person learning, hybrid schedules to everything in between. With a new school year approaching, there are mixed emotions of excitement and nervousness. As most students are transitioning to in-person learning, Stephanie Smigiel, an expert at Allegheny Children's Initiative, offers tips to ease the transition.

### Communication

Keep communication with your child open. If they express their anxiety or concerns, listen and validate them. Ask about not only their day but how they are feeling. Model how to express feelings by sharing your own. If your child is feeling anxious about school safety, share facts that schools are making safety modifications.

### Set a Schedule

Over the summer months, children's schedules adjust to more unstructured time. Since March 2019, school schedules have been adjusted multiple times in response to the pandemic. Children need your help now to set a schedule for the upcoming school year. Each week leading up to the start of school, have them go to bed and get up an hour earlier until they reach the expected bedtime and wake-up time for the school year. Develop and review the after-school expectations such as sports, homework time, dinner, etc. When your child receives their school schedule review it together and if possible, walk their schedule through the school.

### Coping Skills

Help your child by developing and reviewing coping skills to reduce stress and anxiety. Coping skills are things you can do or use to help keep you grounded and lessen the impact of stress. Some suggestions include deep breathing, journaling, meditation/yoga, naming five things you can see/smell/touch, or a fidget item (fidget spinner). Find what works best for your child and encourage them to use it.

### Time to Be a Kid

Don't forget that no matter how old your child is, they are still kids. They need time to decompress from school, sports, clubs, etc. Kids need time to do things they enjoy, such as spending time with friends, watching or participating in sports, having family time, etc. For kids that struggle in times of transitions, provide verbal prompts/warnings or consider setting a timer so they know when it's time to move to the next activity. Letting kids have time to be kids will help reduce stress and allow them to focus on school, homework, or chores/tasks.

### Recognize if Your Child Needs Additional Support

Sometimes stress can lead to anxiety that can be difficult to manage alone. Look out for physical symptoms such as frequent headaches or stomach aches. Other warning signs include your child avoiding or having difficulty concentrating in school or doing homework; abnormal behavioral changes; and/or experiencing constant worries or negative thinking. If your child is having any of these signs, now is a good time to reach out for additional help. **Call Allegheny Children's Initiative at 412-431-8006** or contact your child's school counselor for additional information and support.

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