# 40+ Ways to Support the Back-to-School Transition





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## Practices to Support Anticipatory Anxiety

- Learn about the teacher and try to meet them before school starts.
- Write a letter to the teacher about yourself.
- Shop for school supplies together and let the student pack them in the backpack.
- Practice writing about summer adventures and review photos that help recall the fun of the summer.
- Review classroom rules and schedule.
- Visit the school and let them see where the bathrooms, cafeteria, playground, gym and lockers are, and draw a map of the school to familiarize them with the environment.
- Practice school drop-offs; repetition may be beneficial.
- Connect with classroom and school friends in person at the park, on the phone, or over FaceTime and Zoom weeks before school starts.
- Give them permission to ask as many questions as they need and help find answers instead of dismissing their concerns.
- Listen intentionally. Often, children communicate best during quiet time before bed or riding in the car together, when face-to-face interaction is not required.
- Manage your stress by taking care of yourself as a parent, too.
- Increase going to bed by 10 to 15 minutes each night until you have returned to the school schedule.
- Encourage walking if they have been sedentary during the summer; two 30-minute daily walks can help.
- Connect with the school guidance counsellor for support if anxiety persists.
- Teach deep breathing: breathe in for a count of four, hold for four, and exhale for four.
- Rehearse previous successes and develop words of affirmation that they can repeat and read on the bathroom mirror every day. Tools such as the “Big Life Journal” and the “HappyMe Journal” can help children (preschoolers to teens) develop positive self-talk and recognize damaging, negative self-talk.
- Problem-solve together with excessive reassurance-seeking and asking questions over and over. Reward brave responses.

- Roleplay interactions that might occur with teachers, bus drivers and friends. Allow the child to pretend to be the demanding teacher or the bully. You can use dolls, stuffed animals or puppets to allow the child to communicate.
- Rehearse three positives to look forward to at school.
- Plan breakfast for the first day of school.

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## How to Set Up Expectations the Night Before

- Read or create social stories with the student.
- Use photos to prompt stories with the student.
- Discuss the morning routines or big expectations.
- Help the student problem-solve for expected challenges like sounds, crowds, bright lights, busy hallways, distractions, changing clothes for PE, bells ringing fire alarms.
- Have the child participate in setting out clothes, pack a backpack and put it by the door or in the car, pack lunch, set an alarm clock.
- Discuss wake up time and lights out time during school days.

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## Planning for After-School Down Regulation

- Avoid asking questions immediately until they are ready to talk.
- Stop by a playground on the way home.
- Plan for crunchy snacks that help self-regulation.
- Give as much outdoor time as possible.
- Reduce expectations for the first 30 minutes after arriving home.
- Provide choices (three is a good number) of fun things to do before and after homework.

## Supporting Anxiety Around Making New Friends

- Practice starting conversations. Use tools such as Let's Mingle Conversation Starters School Edition and Letz Talk Conversation Cards to help kids engage. Another tool to inspire conversation is Little Talk for parents to use with their children for meaningful conversation.
- Use a talking stick with your child to teach waiting before interrupting or correcting someone during a conversation.
- Set up playdates prior to school starting.
- Assist with transition by connecting with the school online community to connect with other parents in your child's class so your child knows you are connecting with others and making new friends too.

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## Supporting Sensory Anxiety

- Try on all new school clothes (including socks and shoes) and take pictures. Use a full-length mirror in the room for those with poor body awareness. Time how long it takes to get dressed. Choose clothes for the first week of school.
- Go shopping together for snacks and lunch items. Allow the child to participate in the lunch-packing.
- Use lavender on a tissue in the backpack or a favorite scent that makes them feel calm.
- For fear of the parent not being there to pick them up, have the child set an alarm on the parent's phone for the time they should leave for school as well as pick-up time.

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## For Parents and Caregivers

- School anxiety is a physiological response driven by a fear or feelings of danger; whether the danger is real or not is irrelevant. The child feels the threat and fight-or-flight is triggered, and can manifest as a tantrum or resistance. They are on high alert and it is hard to feel safe. You can tell them about a time you were nervous or anxious and were able to calm yourself.

- To help with separation anxiety, put a picture of the family in the backpack or write a sweet note in the lunchbox. Tell the child what you will be doing while they are away. Use transitional objects, such as a stone, button or handkerchief, that they can keep with them in their pocket or book bag.
- If they experience COVID anxiety, limit news on the TV and internet, screen family conversations about the pandemic, and limit social media that highlights fear.
- Avoid asking leading questions, such as, “Are you nervous about going to school?” This indicates to your child that there really is something to worry about.
- Avoid leading with your own anxiety that will fuel your child’s anxiety.
- Talk about all the ways the school is preparing to keep each child safe.

## Unyte therapeutic programs can also be used to support children experiencing a wide range of challenges.



### Safe and Sound Protocol

The Safe and Sound Protocol (SSP) is a listening therapy designed by Dr. Stephen Porges based on research that is now known as the Polyvagal Theory.

The SSP works alongside other therapeutic approaches and modalities, and can help individuals with trauma, anxiety and depression, sensory processing and other neurodevelopmental differences.

Learn more →



### Rest and Restore Protocol

Rest and Restore Protocol (RRP) is an innovative, clinical-grade listening therapy designed by Dr. Stephen Porges and audio innovator Anthony Gorry.

RRP is informed by decades of research studying physiological rhythms in the body, including heart rate, respiration, blood pressure, and in the gut, alongside deep knowledge of advanced sound technology.

Learn more →



### Integrated Listening System

The Integrated Listening System (ILS) was developed with Ron Minson, MD, and is used to improve brain function through brain and body integration via multisensory input.

The ILS can be used in-person or at home, using specially filtered music combined with fun movement activities and, when ready, cognitive challenges to further activate brain networks.

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