

# Parents, Students Face Back-To-School Blues

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The summer is half over, and we are quickly approaching the time to return to school. As the new school year gets closer, both parents and students will have to make some changes and adjustments to their schedules to prepare for the structured school schedule.

It may be helpful to begin by getting your child (and maybe even yourself) on a good sleep schedule. Begin by going to bed a little earlier each night until you have reached the ultimate desired bedtime. You may also want to practice waking up progressively earlier in the mornings until you reach the time your child or children will be waking up each day during the school year. By making these changes gradually it will not be such a shock to their system (and yours).

Whether or not your child or children is new to a school or just beginning a different grade in the school they attended the previous year, a new school year can still be an adjustment. Your child may be experiencing some anxiety regarding having a new teacher, meeting new peers, or not being in class with their best friend. It is important to talk to your children and listen to their fears. Validate their feelings and encourage them to ask for help if they need it. Help your children identify adults at the school that they may talk to if they are experiencing these feelings during the school day. Some suggestions would be: the school counselor, the teacher, the principal or the school nurse. As a parent, you are your child's natural choice for support. Being that you are not with them during the school day, it will be important for them to know who they can turn to for

support.

Try to make the upcoming change fun for your child. Take them shopping for new school supplies and even some new school clothes if it is in your budget. Allow them to make choices regarding folders and writing utensils, etc. so that they can become excited about returning to school.

If your children are starting at a new school for the first time, try to make sure they are familiar with the school. Come with them on the first day and tour the school with them. If you are able to contact school personnel prior to the first day and get a tour, even better. Help your child feel comfortable with their school. If possible, walk them to their classroom on the first day. Meet their teacher and model for your children. If you are showing them that you are comfortable then they are likely to be more comfortable as well.

It will be important to help your children feel comfortable with the adults at school, especially their teacher. Typically, you find out at the end of the school year who the teacher will be for the upcoming school year. Talk to your children about their new teacher. Encourage them to ask questions and try to remain positive so that they will be positive as well. After all, children learn from their parents/guardians.

Talk to your children about peers at school. Work with them to practice appropriate social skills. Encourage bonding with others and making friends. If you have just moved and your children will be attending a new school, try to make an effort to meet the neighbors so that when your children start school they will feel more at ease seeing a friendly face.

If you have a very young child who will be beginning school for the first time, practice saying goodbye with

them. This way when you say goodbye on the first day of school, it may not be so traumatic. Engage in role plays with them. This could not only be fun, but a learning experience for them as well.

As the first day of school approaches, work on some learning activities with your child. Read with them, do worksheets with them, or allow them to be creative and make something crafty. You do not need to have a classroom in your home over the summer, but you can turn many things into learning experiences.

Make yourself emotionally available to your children. Encourage them to talk to you and share their fears or excitement about school. Sometimes, just knowing you are there can put their mind at ease.

If you find yourself in a pickle and you have tried some or all of these suggestions and your children are still showing signs of struggling, you may need to seek some additional services. Begin first with the school counselor. They are available to meet with students and work on things such as social skills, emotional distress, or other crises. If you establish a partnership with the counselor you may be able to help your child and ease their anxiety and stress. In working with the counselor, they may suggest other outside services to supplement what they are doing in the school. If your children are dealing with separation anxiety or other stress/anxiety disorders they may need more intensive treatment.

There are a variety of agencies within our community that can assist with issues such as these, one being Family Service of the Chautauqua Region Inc. If you are finding that you or your children are needing help coping please call 488-1971 for more information or to schedule an appointment.