



Relieving Back-to-School Anxiety and Stress

by Donna Davis, LMHC

Carefree summer days are dwindling as are hopefully the sounds of “I’m bored!” Soon our families will be in back-to-school mode, along with more regular routines. While routines can be comforting and reassuring, transitions are tough. To kids, the anticipation of new teachers, changing schools, finding and keeping friends, and which activities or clubs to join can be extremely overwhelming, especially during the first few months. Here are a few tips to help keep you sane as school buses are on the road again...

- **Back-to-school anxiety is normal.** Worrying about fitting in, new teachers, and tackling new subjects is to be expected. Reassure your children that you, too, felt the same way. Remind them of how they’ve succeeded in the past in prior tough experiences. Reassurance that they can handle it is what they need instead of dismissing their worries. Consider giving an anxious child a small lollipop during very trying times. The sucking reflex calms us no matter what age! Keep this in mind when your child is frustrated about an upcoming test or assignment. Offer it nonchalantly, without making it about the pop. It helps bring them to the present and focus.
- **Think ahead for smoother transitions.** Make a reminder list of what each child needs each day and post it. Sneakers for gym, lacrosse sticks, etc. Help your children develop a routine of packing up the night before and keep items in a designated area. During the first week of school, make your child’s favorite dinner so he or she has something to look forward to after a long day.
- **Reduce the pressure.** Reinforce routines, including chores, but don’t add to the pressure children can feel by suggesting too many activities. Two activities afterschool each week and one sport per season are plenty. Develop healthy habits that will serve them well as adults, instead of rushing around and putting homework off until last. Remember “The Race to Nowhere”, as shown by the Tri-Town Council.
- **Reinforce positivity.** Ask your child to share one positive thing that happened that day at dinner and you do the same. Don’t let each night turn into a complaint fest. Focus on what you’re all thankful for and what went right. Remember, if you complain every night, so will your child.
- **Just for fun.** For younger children, consider adding lunch box notes to make them smile. For older children, try fun quotes, jokes, or even random good luck charms in their backpack. Consider having a notebook on a table in your home and write a phrase or thought on it such as inspirational quotes, encouraging other family members to do the same. Or write similar fun thoughts on a mirror with a dry-erase marker, such as “Hello, Gorgeous!”

Keep in mind that “this, too, shall pass” as you prepare yourself and your family for back-to-school. Realize what you can control and what you can’t, including the same for your kids. Consider doing something fun as a family, such as a day trip into Boston, a ride to New Hampshire, or just watch a funny movie together and have a good laugh. We all can feel anxious and pressured, but it is the down time with family and friends that truly counts. Help your family learn how to focus on the positives and the negatives won’t be as bad.

Donna Davis is a licensed Mental Health Counselor and owner of Ever After Counseling & Wellness in Middleton and is a member of the Tri-Town Council Advisory Board. Tri-Town Council serves Tri-Town youth and families with the mission of reducing at-risk behavior in youth. Visit us n-line at www.tritowncouncil.org or on Facebook for great resources!