

Back to School Tips for Students Who May Need Extra Support

It's almost time for students to head back to school, whether in the classroom or at-home learning. After a challenging year, preparing children to resume formal learning after the summer off can be a daunting transition, especially for students with special needs.

It's common for students returning to school to experience anxiety about the transition. Some students will have a different teacher, classroom, or school, and with the uncertainty of the COVID19 pandemic and surrounding concerns about health and safety, it's helpful to plan ahead to prepare students to succeed.

Here are a few tips to help students in the transition to the new school year.

Establish (or re-establish) daily routines.

Summer months are often spent chasing fun and we can fall out of the school-year routines that keep us grounded and focused to be set up well to learn and accomplish our goals. Now is a great time to build back up the routines that work for you and your family and ease transitions, which is particularly helpful for children with special needs. Give the new routine some time for everyone to practice before the new school year starts so students feel independent and more than ready for the first day back.

For example, sleep routines are key and have a significant impact on energy, emotions, and behavior. Start moving bedtimes and wake times earlier to prepare for the school schedule, and encourage after-dinner activities that help the whole family to relax and unwind for a good sleep. Set up your morning routine for a stress-free start to the school day.

Talk through feelings of anxiety.

Some children will naturally feel more nervous about heading back to school after spending more time at home for a year and a half. Take time to allow your child to express their feelings and validate their experience before reframing the situation, i.e. if you're child is concerned about being away from you, you can let them know that you will miss them too, but you're excited for them to learn new things this year.

For first-day nervousness, the Time Timer visual timer can help establish routines and allow your children to feel in control and know what to expect. Set the Time Timer to help your kids with morning and evening routines to ease transitions and lessen anxiety.

Anticipate the school day schedule.

Talk about what the school day schedule and routines will look like ahead of time, whether you're preparing for school drop-off or at-home learning. Talking through various scenarios about transportation, classroom activities, school breaks, and so on to help your child know exactly what to

expect.

Review your child's schedule and academic plan (this may include an IEP or 504).

Consider what has changed for your child over the summer to ensure their needs will be accommodated. Reach out to the school and/or your child's teacher(s) and other school professionals that will be supporting your child to ask any questions and establish a positive collaboration (a win-win-win for schools, parents, and students!). If you have tips, share them! Let them know how they can help your child with staying calm, finding focus, handling transitions, and any other concerns.

We hope these tips will make for an easier transition back to school for your family!