

5 tips to help ease your child back into school mode after the holidays

Most children in Australia are going back to school in just over a week. Children experience a mix of emotions when it comes to going to school.

Easing back after the holidays can range from feeling really excited and eager to concern, fear or anxiety. Getting butterflies or general worry about going back to school is common.

Among the biggest worries of preschool children are feeling left out, being teased or saying goodbye to their caregiver at drop off. Concerns of school-aged children are about exams (27%), not wanting to return to school (13%), and problems with teachers (14%). Some feel lonely and isolated.

The main concerns for teens are coping with stress (44.7%), school or study problems (34.3%) and mental health (33.2%).

Not thinking about school until it is time to go back is one way to enjoy the last week of holidays. But for some, this can make going back to school more difficult.

Supporting parents, children and young people with back-to-school challenges can help reduce negative school experiences using the below steps.

1 Set up a back-to-school routine

Create structure about going back with a school routine. Be guided by your knowledge and history of what best supports your child during times of change and transition.

Set up a practical chart of getting ready. You could include:

- What needs to be done each day for school like getting up, eating breakfast, dressing?
- What help does your child need from you to get ready?
- What they can do on their own? (Establish these together).

The first week back can cause disruption from being in holiday mode so don't forget healthy habits around sleep (around 9-11 hours for children aged 5-13 and 8-10 hours for those aged 14-17), exercise (around one hour per day of moderate to vigorous physical activity three times a week) and diet.

Having consistent bed and wake-up times helps too. The National Sleep Foundation suggest starting two weeks before the first day of school to set sleep routine habits. But a week beforehand will help get your kid on their way.

In some way, parents go back to school with their children. Consider adjusting your own schedule to make the transition smoother. If you can't in the mornings, arrange the evenings so you can give as much time as your child needs, especially during the first week.



2 Talk about going back to school

Most children deal with some level of stress or anxiety about school. They have insight into their school experiences, so find out what worries them by asking directly.

You can offer support by normalising experiences of worry and nerves. Reassure your child the feelings they have are common and they will likely overcome them once they have settled in. Worries and courage can exist together.

Depending on your child's age, you can also try the following to help:

- Early years/pre-school – write a social story about going to day-care or school and the routine ahead.
- Primary years – set up a peer-buddy system where a peer or older child meets yours at the school gate or, if neighbours, kids can go into school together.
- Secondary years – establish healthy routines as a family. Support each other around technology use, sleep and schoolwork.



3 Help create a sense of school belonging

A sense of belonging at school can affect academic success and student well-being. Parents can facilitate positive attitudes about school by setting an encouraging tone when talking about it.

Also show an interest in school life and work and be available to support your child both academically and socially.

More than half of the parents in one survey said homework and schoolwork were the greatest drivers of stress in their children. When parents are more engaged in their child's schoolwork, they are better able to support them through it.

4 Look out for signs of stress

Research suggests parents can miss stress or anxiety in their children. Parents can spot stress if their child (depending on age):

- Is more clingy than usual or tries to escape from the classroom.
- Appears restless and flighty or cries.
- Shows an increased desire to avoid activities through negotiations and deal-making.
- Tries to get out of going to school.
- Retreats to thumb sucking, baby language or increased attachment to favourite soft toys (for younger students).

If these behaviours persist for about half a term, talk to your classroom teacher or school well-being coordinator about what is happening. Together work on a strategy of support. There may be something more going on than usual school nerves, like bullying.

5 Encourage questions

Encourage questions children and teens may have about the next term. What will be the same? What will be different?

Often schools provide transition information. If the school hasn't, it might be worth contacting them to see if they can share any resources.

Most importantly, let your child know nothing is off limits to talk about. Set up times to chat throughout the school term – it can help with back-to-school nerves.



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