



BACK TO SCHOOL



The time is approaching for school to begin! Some children may be reluctant to start or return to school. Listed below are some tips for parents to use when dealing with a child who is feeling anxious about going to school:

☆ **Prepare for separation.**

Most children's anxiety is about being without a parent in an unfamiliar place rather than an actual school phobia. You can help your child prepare for school by having him or her spend time somewhere without you. Early experiences in preschool or day care can ease this type of anxiety.

☆ **Be empathetic but firm.**

If your child complains of aches and pains in the morning, let him or her know you understand, but at the same time, emphasize the importance of going to school. Unless your child is vomiting or has a fever, this could be a symptom of anxiety rather than illness and it is better to go to school. If your child really is ill, don't "reward" the sick time-your child should stay in bed and not be allowed to watch TV or play during school hours. Parental attention should be minimal. As soon as symptoms subside, your child should return to school.

☆ **Examine other causes.**

Sometimes a child's resistance to school begins after experiencing teasing or other negative interactions with classmates. Regardless of the situation, it's important for your child to go to school. If the problem is recurring at school, talk to your child's teacher, school counselor or principal.

☆ **Communicate with the teacher.**

As a parent, you need to establish good communication with your child's teacher. Your child is entering a new world that can be very different from your home environment. Teachers may have different rules than you do at home. A teacher may be aware of an issue related to your child that's not obvious to you. If you identify problems related to the teacher or school, speak to your child's teacher or to the school principal about the situation and possible solutions.

☆ **Teach positive self-talk.**

You can teach your child to think more constructively about problems. Find ways to build your child's self-esteem by suggesting positive self-talk, such as: "I know that sometimes it's hard to go to school, but I can be brave and do hard things." Tell your child about ways you have dealt with things that cause you fear or anxiety.

☆ **Use books to reduce anxiety.**

Local libraries and bookstores have children's books about heroes who conquer their fears. Some of these stories deal directly with discomfort about school. Reading stories about other children who have coped with similar problems can motivate your child to face his or her own anxieties.

☆ **Seek professional help.**

If your child absolutely refuses to enter the school building, you may need professional assistance. A psychologist or counselor can help you and your child deal with the situation.

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