

## 5 Tips to Ease Back-to-School Anxiety

Source: [Johns Hopkins Medicine](#)

The transition back to class as summer ends can be a stressful time for children and parents alike. Some anxiety is a normal response, but parents should know the difference between normal back-to-school jitters and anxiety that warrants clinical attention.

There are several easy ways to tell when a child's anxiety is cause for concern, say psychology experts from the Johns Hopkins Children's Center.

Anxiety symptoms that persist beyond the first few weeks of school and that seem excessive may require consultation with an expert, says Johns Hopkins Children's Center psychologist Courtney Keeton, who specializes in the treatment of childhood anxiety and selective mutism.

Many children, for example, display some difficulty separating from parents to attend school, however tantrums when separating, problems sleeping alone or refusal to attend activities without parents may suggest a problem requiring intervention.

Likewise, some shyness or worry about schedules, schoolwork, or friends is natural during the back-to-school transition, but ongoing withdrawal or worries may signal a problem.

"If a child's anxiety is causing a great deal of distress in her or his daily life, or if getting along with family members or friends becomes difficult, normal activities in and outside of school are avoided, or there are physical symptoms like stomach-aches or fatigue, these 'red flags' indicate that the child's anxiety should be evaluated by a child psychologist or psychiatrist," says Keeton.

However, it is normal for nearly all children to experience mild back-to-school jitters that gradually diminish over a few weeks.

Tips to Ease Anxiety:

- A week or two before school, start preparing children for the upcoming transition by getting back to school year routines, such as a realistic bedtime and selecting tomorrow's clothes.
- Arrange play dates with one or more familiar peers before school starts. Research shows that the presence of a familiar peer during school transitions can improve children's academic and emotional adjustment.
- Visit the school before the school year begins, rehearse the drop-off and spend time on the playground or inside the classroom if the building is open. Have the child practice walking into class while the parent waits outside or down the hall.
- Come up with a prize or a rewarding activity that the child could earn for separating from mom or dad to attend school.
- Validate the child's worry by acknowledging that, like any new activity, starting school can be hard but soon becomes easy and fun.