

AUGUST 2026

KNOW! HOW TO PREPARE KIDS FOR BACK-TO-SCHOOL



HELP KIDS FEEL PREPARED, SUPPORTED, AND CONFIDENT THIS SCHOOL YEAR.



Back-to-school season can be a big transition for kids and caregivers. New routines, changing schedules, school-related anxiety, and busy mornings take adjustment. Whether school is starting soon or already underway, caregivers can help children and teens feel prepared, supported, and confident. Reflect together on what is working, what is not, and where extra support may help. There is no one-size-fits-all approach.

A NOTE FOR CAREGIVERS

- What's working?
- What isn't?
- Where could extra support help?

HERE ARE FIVE WAYS TO HELP YOUR FAMILY FIND ITS BACK-TO-SCHOOL RHYTHM.

1

PREPARE SUPPLIES AND RESOURCES

Having school supplies, schedules, and plans in place can help the transition feel smoother. Check whether your child still needs a backpack, notebooks, pencils, lunchboxes, other supplies, or additional resources.² When possible, scheduling vaccinations and wellness checkups during summer can reduce stress once school begins.^{1,4} Shopping together can help children feel excited and involved in the planning process.^{1,4}

TALKING TIP

Show real enthusiasm when your child picks out an item they like during back-to-school shopping to help reinforce the excitement for the upcoming school year. A good example could be, **"That pencil pouch is so unique; I am sure your friends will love it!"**

2

CO-CREATE THE ROUTINE WITH YOUR CHILD

Before school begins or during the first few weeks, involve your child or teen in creating and adjusting their routine.¹ Provide support while encouraging age-appropriate independence. For younger children, use pictures, charts, or simple verbal reminders. Build in enough time so mornings do not feel stressful or rushed.¹

Consistent mealtimes, physical activity, and sleep schedules throughout the year, including summer and holiday breaks, can make the transition easier.² Practice helps build healthy habits.^{4,5,9}

TALKING TIP

Talk with your child or teen about which part of the morning is most difficult and how you can work together to create a schedule that sets them up for success. Ask them, **"What part of your morning felt most overwhelming last year, and what can I do to help?"**

3

PRACTICE THE ROUTINE AND DISCUSS HOW IT WENT

Before the first day, practice the routine during a calm, low-stress time. Visiting an open house, meeting a teacher, seeing the classroom, or visiting the bus stop can help younger children feel comfortable and prepared.^{1,3,4,8} If school has started, reflect on how routines are working and make adjustments. Treat routines as a learning process, not a success or failure. Ask what felt confusing, what went well, and what could make tomorrow easier. Be patient, acknowledge effort, and celebrate progress.⁶

TALKING TIP

Use clear, short, and positive messages when practicing the back-to-school routine.⁶ For younger children, try reminders such as, **"First we get dressed, then we eat breakfast,"** and reinforce their efforts with specific praise: **"You remembered what comes next—great job!"**

4

ENCOURAGE POSITIVE CONNECTIONS WITH SCHOOL

Friends, sports, favorite classes, and activities can help children and teens feel connected to school, serving as a protective factor against risky behaviors.² Ask what they are excited about, what they have enjoyed before, and which new activities they may want to try.¹ Avoid over-scheduling or overcommitting.⁴ Do not present school as punishment; model a calm, supportive attitude toward school involvement.¹

TALKING TIP

Ask what your child or teen is looking forward to with the start of the new school year and if they have any new goals. Support their new goals by asking, **"Is there anything I can do to help you achieve your goals this year?"**¹

5

VALIDATE EMOTIONS AND KNOW WHEN TO SEEK HELP

Children and teens may feel excitement, fear, sadness, or anxiety as school begins. Ask how they feel, listen without judgment, and ask how you can support them.¹ Model healthy stress reduction and age-appropriate coping techniques.⁸ If intense anxiety or distress continues and interferes with daily life, consider consulting a mental health professional for additional tools and assistance.⁸

TALKING TIP

Young people may need support processing emotions like excitement, fear, or sadness. Validate their feelings by saying, **"I know that must be scary for you"** or **"I understand how difficult that was."**

RESOURCES

- <https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/family-resources-education/back-to-school>
- <https://childmind.org/resource/s/back-to-school>
- <https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/news/publications/health-matters/school-year-stress-tips-for-parents>
- <https://www.pbs.org/parents/back-to-school>
- <https://www.nami.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/Three-Keys-2026.pdf>

SOURCES

1. <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/how-to-prepare-kids-for-school>
2. <https://childmind.org/article/helping-kids-back-school-routine/>
3. <https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/family-resources-education/700childrens/2018/08/back-to-school-tips>
4. <https://www.franciscanhealth.org/community/blog/8-back-to-school-tips>
5. <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/56554>
6. <https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/family-resources-education/700childrens/2022/01/creating-successful-morning-routine>
7. <https://www.cdc.gov/youth-behavior/school-connectedness/index.html>
8. <https://childmind.org/article/back-school-anxiety/>
9. <https://www.nami.org/kids-teens-and-young-adults/school-resources/school-break-resources-for-parents/>

Scan for additional Know!
Prevention Tips for Everyone:

