

BACK to SCHOOL

COPING WITH ANXIETY & STRESS KIT A TOOLKIT FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS

Stress and anxiety can happen immediately or gradually over time. It is important to have tools that can help prevent and manage your stress and anxiety. We tend to feel less stressed and anxious when we are in control. As we have learned over the past couple years, there are many things that are out of our control. One thing that is important when it comes to managing stress and anxiety is feeling prepared. It is highly recommended to practice techniques and coping skills BEFORE you become stressed or anxious.

Below are some tools for your mental health tool belt, especially when it comes to preparing for school to resume this fall.



Feeling Prepared



- **Assist your student with practicing independence.**
 - For younger students, help them practice opening milk containers, tying shoes and zipping up their coat. Create a goodbye wave, hug or handshake.
 - For older students, having them organize their folders and notebooks to match their class schedule could be helpful.
- **Establish a routine for when school starts.**
 - A couple of weeks before school starts, help your student get back into a routine that works for school. This could mean establishing a consistent bedtime and wake time or practicing eating lunch in the same amount of time given during school hours. Discuss and practice drop off and pick up plans. It may be helpful to create organization in your home to include a space for backpacks, lunch boxes and other school related items.
 - Discuss a routine for keeping track of assignments and completing homework to avoid getting behind.
- **Get familiar with your school.**
 - Attend back to school events to familiarize your student(s) with the building, locker, classroom, playground, etc. Letting your student practice opening their locker and finding their classes can help ease anxiety once school starts. Try inviting a friend to attend the same time you do.
- **Connect and talk with the school counselor, social worker, teacher and/or principal** before starting school if your student is reporting high anxiety and/or stress about attending school.
- **Listen to your student's concerns about attending school.** Validate that these feelings can be a normal response to starting school. Assure your child/teen that they are not alone. Other students are likely feeling similar feelings. Be excited about school starting. Excitement can be contagious!
- **Begin cutting back screen time and setting earlier bedtimes before the first day of school.** A gradual transition can help prevent behavior challenges and make it easier for students to arrive at school rested, focused, and ready to learn.





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Techniques to Practice

Practice coping skills such as deep breathing with your student. Encouraging your student to take a deep breath when they feel their heart racing can help to decrease their anxiety.

Practice Positive Thinking

- **Find the good** – help your child identify at least one good thing they did or experienced that day.
- **Think positive** – Help your child challenge negative thoughts by asking:
 - Is this thought helpful, true, or healthy? If it is not, work with your child to reframe negative thoughts to be realistic and healthy.
- **Give encouragement** – Compliment your child on their efforts towards schoolwork despite the grade or outcome. This will reinforce your child to keep trying and increase confidence.



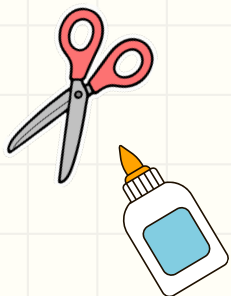
Breathing Techniques

- **Deep Breathing (older adolescents/adults)**: Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose. Exhale slowly through your mouth. Breathe in for 4 counts, hold for 7 counts and release slowly for 8 counts.
- **Belly Breathing (balloon breaths)**: Practice using bubbles (forces you to blow slowly and carefully to make a bubble). Use a stuffed animal to practice deep breathing. Lay on your back, place a stuffed animal on your stomach and practice breathing in through the mouth and out through the nose. The stuffed animal should move up and down.
- **Triangle Breathing**: Draw a triangle. Starting in the left corner, trace the line and breathe in for 3 counts. Trace the line coming down and hold for 3 counts. Then, trace the bottom line and exhale for 3 counts.
- **Square Breathing**: Draw a square. Starting in the left corner, trace the line going up and breathe in for 4 counts. Hold your breath for 4 counts as you trace the top line. Breathe out for 4 counts while tracing the right line down. Then as you trace the bottom line, hold your breath for 4 counts.

Calming Techniques

- **5,4,3,2,1 Grounding Exercise**
 - Name 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste.
- Drink a glass of water.
- Squeeze something or use a stress/fidget toy.
- Draw, color, or doodle.
- Practice positive affirmations verbally or by writing them down.
- Listen to music.
- Maintain a regular sleep schedule and ensure your child/teen is getting enough sleep at night.
- Change what you are thinking about and try to practice positive thinking.





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Physical Activities

Make a list of activities that your child/teen can do that involves movement such as:

- Go for a walk, run, or bike ride – get outside!
- Play a sport or an outdoor game with friends and/or family!
- Doing a workout like jumping jacks or skipping.
- Be sure to check out YouTube videos for more kid-friendly workout ideas!
- Spend some time at the park – invite your friends to join.
- Dance! Put on your favorite song and have a dance party.
- Practice yoga.



Other Calming Techniques to Try

- Make a list of activities that your child/teen can do that can help with their overall mental wellbeing such as:
- Get crafty or start a garden.
- Spend quality time with your loved ones.
- Call a family member who doesn't live close – try to video call if possible!
- Write a letter to a friend or family member.
- Practice breathing tips
- Check out our **document hub** for more mindfulness tips and free resources!
- Mindfulness for kids – we recommend **these apps** for kids to practice mindfulness.

Safety/Emergency Plan

- Create a safety plan with your child/teen that includes rehearsing.
- Include emergency numbers.
- Include how you will contact each other.
- Make an emergency kit (include at least 3 days worth of supplies).

Tips for Parents

Remember, it's important to take care of yourself too!

- Practice some of the healthy coping skills above with your child/teen. Even just a few minutes a day can help to reduce stress and anxiety.
- Connect with other parents through forums, social media, or local meetups. Sharing experiences and tips can provide a sense of community and support.
- If your child continues to show signs of distress after the first few weeks of school, consider consulting a mental health professional. They can provide additional support and strategies to manage anxiety.

