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Back-to-school time for kids and parents

Kids may claim they're not ready to go back to school, but most parents definitely are ready for them to go! By mid-August, even the most child-centered parent is eager for the new school year to begin. Most moms and dads are looking forward to getting back on track with days that are organized and managed by someone else - the school. Many kids also are excited to get back to friends, teachers and school activities.

Even though they may try to hide it, most kids and many parents are nervous about new beginnings. They wonder what the new teacher will be like. Who will be in their classes? Will old friends still be their friends? Each academic year, kids begin a new job. Starting over can be very stressful, even for adults. As parents, we worry about our children's abilities to feel successful in demanding situations.

Parents can do more to prepare kids for school than shop for clothes and school supplies. We can start by talking with our children, not at them. Encourage children to express their anxieties and assure them that others frequently have similar worries. Discussing all the positive things that happen at school and reminding children of their past successes can be very beneficial, especially when done in an informal setting. Talk about before and after school activities, as well as anticipated fun with old and new friends.

If possible, parents should take younger children to school before the new year begins to help them locate their classroom and meet their teachers. The trip to school is often easier if parents, siblings, friends, or classmates accompany children on their first day.

Adults-- worried about jobs, income, bills, and numerous other personal responsibilities-- may underestimate the importance of the first day of school. Children's worries, however, must be acknowledged. Recognizing these anxieties is one step on the road to successful parenting. Planning for school includes decisions regarding walking, busing, or biking and picking a safe route. Planning also involves making snack and meal choices. What food choices are available in school? Will buying obesity-promoting, empty calorie, carbonated beverages be permitted? Planning also involves before and after school decisions. What are safe and stimulating choices of activities?

Parents, also have jobs in school. They must work in partnership with teachers and school administrators throughout the year to positively address academic, behavioral, or social issues, and to resolve conflicts. Let your kids know that their school is important to you and that you want to help them feel successful. Speak positively about the school environment and the value of learning. More information on back-to-school issues and many other topics is available online from the American Academy of Pediatrics at www.aap.org.

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