



August: National Back-to-School Month

August marks the end of summer vacation and the time that many children in the United States are heading back to school. The back-to-school season can be hectic and nerve-wracking for everyone involved with preparations for a new academic year. In some cases, heading back to school sparks an upswing in anxiety for many children, particularly for children who already struggle with anxiety or have anxiety disorders. Although not every DoD employee is a parent, there are many ways to support young people. Begin by observing some common behaviors which may suggest a child is experiencing above-average anxiety around the return to school.

Examples of behaviors:

- Continually **seeking reassurance** or asking repeated, worried questions despite already receiving an answer.
- **Increased physical complaints**, such as headaches, stomachaches, and fatigue in the absence of an actual illness.
- **A significant change in sleep pattern**, such as taking an hour to fall asleep when a child normally goes to sleep quickly, or waking you up with worries during the night when a child typically sleeps well.
- **Avoiding school-related activities**, such as school tours, teacher meet-and-greets, or avoiding school itself once the year starts.

Recommendations for parents and guardians:

- **Approach anxiety instead of avoiding it.** Avoidance can contribute to a vicious cycle which reinforces anxiety in the long term.
- **Practice school-day routines** such as waking up, eating breakfast, packing a school bag and traveling to school. School tours and meet-and-greet days can also be great opportunities for practice.
- **Model behavior you would like to see** in your child. Model the calm behavior you would like to see in your child when you have moments for frustration.
- **Ensure enough sleep and a healthy diet.** Fatigue and crankiness from not getting enough sleep or the proper nutrition can make children much more vulnerable to anxiety.

If a child's worries about the return to school start to interfere with their ability and willingness to attend school or participate in other activities, such as camp or sports that they typically love, consider consulting with a licensed mental health professional who specializes in the mental and emotional health of children and young people.

Additional Resources:

- US Department of Education: <https://sites.ed.gov/backtoschool/>
- Harvard Health Publishing: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/back-to-school-anxiety-2018082314617>
- Very Well Family: www.verywellfamily.com/tips-to-ease-back-to-school-anxiety-620832

For additional information, email the DCPAS Work-Life Branch at:

dodhra.mc-alex.dcpas.mbx.dod-worklife@mail.mil

