



READY, SET, THRIVE: A MENTALLY HEALTHY RETURN TO SCHOOL

EASE INTO THE SCHOOL YEAR *with Dr. Negar Beheshti's Q&A Guide*

As the new school year approaches, transitions can be challenging for both students and parents. Dr. Negar Beheshti, Chief Medical Officer for MiraVista Behavioral Health Center and a board-certified psychiatrist specializing in child, adolescent, and adult psychiatry has compiled a helpful Q&A guide to address common concerns and provide practical tips for a smooth back-to-school experience. Information provided covers everything from managing anxiety to establishing routines, ensuring that everyone feels prepared and supported for the year ahead.

For additional back-to-school resources, please visit www.miravistabhbcare

What type of anxiety do children face, on the extreme and not so extreme end, as they contemplate going back to school?

“How a young person feels about returning to school after summer break varies by age and situation. Some students may be a bit nervous but overall welcome going back to its daily routines, catching up with classmates, and anticipating upcoming events. Others may feel the stress of the new academic year around homework assignments, how well they will perform in their classes and the ease with which they will meet and make new friends. Students for whom school feels unsafe – they may have been bullied for example - may not want to return to school at all. Understanding the spectrum of anxiety children may face is important for providing appropriate support. Mild anxiety often resolves with reassurance and gradual exposure, while more severe cases might require professional intervention, such as counseling or therapy, to help the child manage their fears.”

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What should parents be on the lookout for concerning behavior and how can they handle a child with anxiety about going back to school?

“School-related anxieties should lessen for students as they adjust to the year’s new routines and expectations. Signs a young person may be struggling to adjust include an inability to focus, physical complaints, such as stomach and head aches, and an ongoing reluctance to attend school. Asking a child – especially a younger one - how they are feeling inside themselves may help them discuss what is bothering them. Adolescents may open up to parents who indicate they are willing to listen without judgement. A call to a child’s pediatrician can help determine if further support is needed to address an emotional or mental health issue. Encourage your child to express their feelings and listen without judgment. Ask open-ended questions about their concerns and validate their emotions. Let them know it’s okay to feel anxious. If a child’s anxiety is severe or doesn’t improve with time, consider seeking help from a mental health professional, such as a child psychologist or therapist, who can provide tailored support and interventions.”

Do you see a rise in back-to-school anxiety for the summer?

“Back-to-school anxiety is not uncommon for students of any age. The concern is when this anxiety becomes chronic and interferes with daily routines. Factors that can drive this include negative experiences at school, access to mental health care, and family resources. One study done over a period of years in different school districts estimated that approximately 1 in 6 students had enough symptoms during those years to be diagnosed with a childhood mental health disorder.”

What about a parent's anxiety over their child going to school for the first time or returning to a new academic year?

“It’s natural for parents to experience anxiety when their child is going to school for the first time or returning to a new academic year. This anxiety can stem from concerns about the child’s safety, well-being, academic performance, or social interactions. Constantly planning or overthinking details related to the child’s school routine, supplies, or logistics. However, parents and adult caregivers should be aware of their expressing worry in front of the child, which might inadvertently increase the child’s own anxiety about school. Recognize that it’s normal to feel anxious. Accepting our emotions without judgment is the first step toward managing them effectively. Remember to focus on the positive aspects of their education and growth rather than projecting unnecessary concern about what might or go wrong. By addressing one’s own anxiety, you can better support your child through their school experience, creating a positive and nurturing environment for them to succeed.”