

# EASING RETURN-TO-SCHOOL ANXIETY DURING COVID-19: 9 TIPS FOR PARENTS

## VALIDATE FEELINGS

Remind your child that it is normal and OK to feel anxious about returning to school after so long away.

## COMMUNICATE

Have age-appropriate conversations about what is happening and what to expect.

## REASSURE SAFETY

Stay calm and stay positive, and remind your child that school staff are working hard to keep them safe. Review with your child ways that you have been practicing being safe at home and in public, such as wearing masks, washing hands and maintaining physical distance.

## ESTABLISH ROUTINE AND STRUCTURE

Remind your child of their daily schedule especially since they have experienced about 18 months with a different type of schedule.

## PROMOTE FLEXIBILITY

Given the pandemic's fluid nature, it's prudent to have conversations about how conditions, routines and environments may change in the future.

## TRY A PRACTICE RUN

If your child is having a really difficult time and you feel like talking isn't enough, you can visit the school campus together when there is no one there and have your child get reacquainted with it again.

## WORK ON EMOTION IDENTIFICATION

Work together with children to help them communicate and understand their feelings. A tool like a "feelings chart" where different faces illustrate feelings can help children identify what they might be experiencing. Movies like "Inside Out" also do a great job teaching emotional literacy.

## EXPLAIN, MODEL EMOTION REGULATION

Children take cues from their parents about how to respond to situations. Those nerves may be mutual, so parents should model their emotions and coping skills appropriately. For example, a parent might say, "When Dad is feeling worried, he takes three deep breaths."

## PRAISE

Children respond well to praise. Parents should be sure to call out behaviors they want to reinforce. For example, "I loved how you put on your shoes so quickly when we needed to leave for school."

