

Compass

Getting back into the school year groove

Can it really be that time of year already? Bus rides, homework, parent-teacher conferences and school lunches? Yes, it's time think about getting back into the school-year groove.

For some, the back-to-school routine can be a stressful time of change. Both parents and kids can feel pretty overwhelmed at the prospect. However, there are a number of proactive steps you can take while it's still summer to help the whole family be better prepared for that big first day.

This edition of *Compass* provides tips on how to ease some of the common back-to-school challenges, including overcoming stress and anxiety that can accompany new beginnings. To help you guide your kids into a positive back-to-school mindset, *Compass* offers:

- Tips to help children get organized and ready to learn prior to the start of school this year.
- Techniques for managing your child's anxiety, if he or she is struggling with the process of returning to school.
- Ways to help kids limit their stress during the school year.

Log on and learn! Look for *Back to School Prep* on the Magellan member website under the Library/In the Spotlight section. There you can access resources to help you manage life's transitions and new beginnings.

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How to gear up for school in advance

Here are some steps you can take prior to the first opening bell at school.

Start the morning routine early. Plan to curtail summertime sluggishness about two weeks prior to the start of school. Move bedtimes and wakeup times earlier until they match the school schedule.

Meet the teacher or attend an orientation. If your child will be starting at a new school this year, contact the school and request a visit.

Review important dates and complete forms. Put important school schedule dates on the family calendar. Get started early on completing health and emergency contact forms.

Establish transportation plans. Review the school's bus stop location and schedule, in addition to drop-off and/or bike ride procedures.

Review your after-school rules with children. This can include who else is allowed in the house (if anyone), and procedures for checking in with you.

Coping with children's anxiety

Heading back to school can be an exciting time, but it can also be pretty stressful—for both children and parents. Here are some ideas on how to counter those first-day butterflies with your child.

Practice being apart

If this is the first time your child will be away from you during the day, ease him or her into it. Start by setting up a partial day spent at a close relative or friend's house.

Read about it

Your child may get some reassurance from reading one of the many age-appropriate books that show children overcoming their worries about starting school.

Recount your own experiences

Describe for your child how you once felt scared when starting a new grade, school or activity. Explain how everything turned out fine, and that he or she will be okay too.

Preview coming attractions

Remind your child about some of the fun new activities that he or she might participate in this year—clubs, sports, music, drama, student government, etc.

Pack up early

A bit of planning can help cut down on morning chaos. Have your child set out his or her clothes and load the backpack on the night before school days.

Establish a goodbye ritual

Pick a fun phrase or gesture you can share with your child when parting each morning. Repeated use of a familiar phrase can give the child comfort.

Be calm and exude confidence

Even though the back-to-school jitters may be getting under your skin just a bit, strive to be calm, confident and positive. Tell your children that it's natural to feel uncertain, and you're sure that they'll do great this year.

Help them shake off school year stress

Don't demand achievement. Support your child's learning, but don't insist on excellence in every school-related activity. Provide your unconditional love regardless of their path.

Trim activities if necessary. If your child's after-school activities are resulting in too much family chaos and homework stress, eliminate an activity or two. Use dinnertime to de-stress and bond as a family.

Prioritize adequate sleep. Depending on their ages, kids need at least nine to 11 hours of sleep per night. Good sleep supports learning, memory, and the energy needed to be resilient.

Be available. If you notice your child having a bad day, do something simple together like a walk or a craft or playing catch. Non-pressure situations can lead to more sharing.

