

Preparing Your Child for School

When you think of back-to-school preparation, many people focus on getting the right supplies, picking out new outfits and making sure kids are learning their numbers and letters. However, the best way to prepare your child for school is to focus on their social/emotional wellbeing. A child who is overly anxious or feels unsafe will not be able to be as available to learning the academics offered to them. If your child can identify and express their emotions and know how to help themselves manage big feelings, they will be set up for a much more successful school year. We've gathered suggestions from our Pediatric Therapy team to help support you as you support your child.

Parent/Caregiver Tips:

- Visit the new school (both inside and outside). Attend any orientations or schedule a tour so that your child can visualize where they will be on school days. Do this a few times to fill in any gaps.
- Plan playdates with peers at the school playground if possible. For many kids, learning how to socialize appropriately at school can be a big challenge. They may feel nervous about learning to navigate a new playground or different equipment. By giving them opportunities to practice on site, their feelings of fear and stress will likely decrease.
- Create a consistent routine for morning, after school and bedtime. Start practicing bedtime and wakeup times a couple weeks before school starts to make it less of a change in routine. Some families find it helpful to set timers to keep things on track while other families might choose to play soothing, rhythmic, repetitive music like drumming to keep things moving forward. These routines and traditions can be really helpful for maintaining a sense of balance as well.
- Identify and organize tools for comfort and regulation. Some families find it helpful to add a fidget or a weighted lap pad to their child's backpack. Having easy access to a protein snack and water bottle is especially important to help manage the effects of fluctuating blood sugar and hydration.
- Explore the idea of safe adults and meet a few at the school. Start discussions about who is a safe grown up at school. Help kids identify who "feels" safe to them. Don't just stop at identifying the teacher or school counselors. Often kids really connect with the cafeteria staff or a principal. Think about different issues together and help kids brainstorm who they might want to seek out for support in the school environment in each case.



- Incorporate books that provide kids with a chance to relate to an imaginary storyline of overcoming challenges, learning new things, and expected school behaviors. Some of our favorites are: *The Kissing Hand* and *The Invisible String*. Reading these books consistently can help kids process through their feelings.
- Expect After School Restraint Collapse. When children are at school, they often work hard to keep it together emotionally and then lose control when they get home. This is normal and to be expected, especially around big transitions like starting school. See the Online Resources listed below for more information.
- Manage your own feelings of anxiety around this milestone. This one can be hard to hear but it's important for adults to recognize that kids are constantly responding to the stress levels around them. If your child notices you are nervous, they are likely to either cover up their own feelings or experience even more anxious feelings. It's important for adults to be proactive about practicing strategies like deep breathing and mindfulness so that kids can start to normalize feeling anxious and using appropriate tools to manage those feelings.
- Practice healthy goodbyes/hellos. Don't be tempted to sneak out when your child isn't looking. Kids usually do best when their parent/caregiver gives them a quick hug, reminds them they'll see them soon (and maybe even a quick reference to a comfort item) and promptly exits. When you see your child after school, resist the temptation to pepper them with questions about their day or admonish them for any mistakes during the day. Let them see your eyes light up at the sight of them and let them know how happy you are to see them.

Next Steps:

If you start to notice that your child is not settling into the school routine after a few weeks, it may be helpful to contact your pediatrician, a local therapist, or the counselor at your child's school.

Online Resources:

Tip Sheet on Childhood Anxiety

<https://www.encompassnw.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Encompass-Childhood-Anxiety-Parent-Handout.pdf>

Tip Sheet on Emotion Coaching

<https://www.encompassnw.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Encompass-Emotion-Coaching-Parent-Handout.pdf>

After School Restraint Collapse Workshop Video

<https://youtu.be/1TytUUgfnNw>

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9050 384th Ave. SE
Snoqualmie, WA 98065
425.888.3347

Early Learning Center
1407 Boalch Ave. NW
North Bend, WA 98045
425.888.2777

Carnation Preschool
4950 Tolt Ave.
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