

School: **Back-to-School Tips**



Now that your children are back at school, keep an eye on them to see if you notice any behavior changes. The two main changes children experience with the onset of the school year are anxiety and sleep deprivation. As a parent, you can help with both of these.

Sleep Deprivation

Sleep deprivation may seem like an easy problem to rectify. However, with children's packed schedules and changing sleep habits, it can actually be quite difficult. Sleep deprivation most often occurs in children reaching puberty. Their internal body clocks have altered so that they may not even feel tired until eleven at night. This is a problem if they need to wake up by six in the morning to catch the bus, especially since most teenagers need approximately nine hours of sleep a night.

The best thing you as a parent can do to help is to keep them to a schedule, even on the weekends. They may want to sleep until noon on Sunday, but that won't help them Sunday night when they can't fall asleep and they end up dragging through their school day on Monday.

When you notice them yawning or looking fatigued during the week, suggest they cut back on some extra-curricular activities.

Help them wind down at the end of each day by not allowing them to play video games, work on the computer, or watch the news right before bed.

Make their sleep area a comfortable one without distractions and if they're having trouble falling asleep, have them establish a bedtime routine such as reading, listening to music, or taking a warm bath.

Anxiety

A new school year often brings about anxiety in children and, while this is nothing to worry excessively about, it is something to address. They may simply be excited about seeing friends, taking new classes, and joining new activities and this excitement may appear to you to be anxiety.

- Children experience different types of anxiety. Younger children often feel separation anxiety, especially if they aren't used to being away from their parents for hours at a time. Let them know that this separation is hard but necessary. Stress all of the fun things they'll be doing at school. Most children overcome this fear within a few days.
- Many children, particularly middle and high school-age children, experience social anxiety

disorder. If they're afraid to speak up in class and seem withdrawn, this may be the problem. Getting them to talk about their fears may help dispel them. Let them know that many other children feel the same way and that it's a perfectly normal reaction to an unfamiliar situation. Maybe share an experience from your life that parallels their fear. However, if their social anxiety starts to interfere with their normal everyday activities, call the EAP to speak with a professional who can offer you suggestions on what to do.

- Don't let your children stretch themselves too thin. It's important that they have some "downtime" every day where they can relax. Also, if they're involved in too many activities, they may not really enjoy any of them to the fullest. Suggest that they choose the one or two that most interest them. And don't forget to suggest non-school related social activities as well.

If your child doesn't settle into a workable school routine after a few months, you may want to consult with a pediatrician. In most cases, however, school anxiety is a normal and temporary part of a child's growth and development.



For further information, please call your EAP:

1.800.492.4357

Callers with TTY equipment, please call:

1.800.338.2039

Online Services: www.mhnetep.com

