



Know! To Ease The Transition Back To School

There are certain times in an adolescent's life where they are at greater risk for the onset of alcohol and other drug use due to increased stress—particularly during periods of transition. When students start at a new school, it's natural for them to experience a great deal of stress regarding new teachers, new friends, new social status and new expectations. While a little bit of stress can be a positive motivator, an overwhelming amount of stress can be detrimental and dangerous. Sometimes, to cope with their strong negative emotions, young people may turn to risky behaviors.

It's important to keep this in mind as youth transition back to school this fall—even if they are returning to the same school, with the same group of peers. Due to the uncertainty and ever-changing regulations students experienced last year, many are likely to feel apprehensive as to what to expect for this year. What will the classrooms be like? What will the hallways be like? Will we be required to wear masks in the school building? Will there be social distancing? Will the plexiglass barriers still be up?

Depending on your location and school district rulings, those questions are up for debate. And that can cause stress. Plus, many young people have not been as social as they were before the pandemic and may be dealing with greater-than-usual amounts of social anxiety.

Students will eventually settle into their new normal; however, there are 10 specific actions parents can take to support their tweens and teens through the transition, according to Ambre Associates:

- 1. Allow for feelings.** Teens are going to have a lot of feelings—and it's important to let them have these feelings.
- 2. Listen.** One of the most helpful things you can do for your adolescent is to listen to their

stories, hear their concerns and empathize with their feelings—without judgment.

3. Preserve routines. As much as possible, try to keep the same morning, after-school, evening and bedtime routines in place.

4. Ensure self-care for both you and your teen. Nutritious meals, quality sleep, exercise and stress management allow you to stay strong, especially during trying times.

5. Maintain boundaries. It's tempting to loosen the discipline when your child is going through a hard time, but rules and boundaries build trust. Be consistent in your parenting.

6. Offer choices. Teens often feel a lack of control, and even more so during times of transition. Where possible, allow them to voice their opinions, form their own likes and dislikes and make choices.

7. Stay realistically positive. Remind your teen of past accomplishments—like how resilient and strong they've been through all the changes they were faced with over the past two school years.

8. Separate your anxiety from theirs. Recognize that you may have unresolved "stuff" from your adolescence that gets triggered by your teen's experiences. Stay in your own lane, using caution not to blur your journey with theirs.

9. Don't project your worries. Your concerns about any given transition may not be theirs. Even if you're worried about what school is going to look like for your child this year, your teen might not be the least bit concerned—until you plant seeds of doubt by asking anxiety-provoking questions.

10. Ask for help. If you feel like things are getting out of control, or you see that your teen is so anxious that they're not sleeping or if you're worried about drug and alcohol use, reach out to a professional, who can help guide your teen—and you—through a challenging transition.

Tips For School Personnel

Anxiety thrives on uncertainty. School administrators and teachers can help students' and parents' transition back-to-school with these steps:

- Provide clear information to families as early as possible (changes, expectations, plans).
- Model good coping behaviors for students—be calm, honest, and caring.
- Praise and reward students for being courageous.
- Be open, honest and encouraging to students (but not overly reassuring).
- Validate, support and listen to students.
- Do not hesitate to seek assistance if a student is struggling.

Sources

[Ambre Associates, Denise K. Ambre, LCSW, Teens and Transitions: How to Help Your Adolescent Navigate Change.](#)

[Anxiety Canada - 7 Tips for Educators Returning to School During COVID-19.](#)

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