



### How to help children manage stress during the school year

Going back to school means new responsibilities, and children of all ages can feel a range of emotions surrounding the beginning, middle and end of the school year. Students may have a variety of feelings, such as excitement, sleepless nights, anxiety, and depression. Cynthia Jones from Children's of Alabama suggests the following tips to help prepare your child for school:

**Prepare your child for the school year ahead of time.** Children and teens are still in a period of emotional and mental development. Help your child adjust to new responsibilities, experiences, and social interactions throughout the school year with the following tips.

- Teach and encourage children to make friends and connect with people face-to-face (not via social media).
- Set and maintain a routine for children to follow.
- Have children practice self-care through healthy hygiene and sleeping habits.
- Let children set and work towards reaching attainable goals.
- Help your child maintain a positive sense of self. Try to avoid criticism.
- Teach children how to keep a positive outlook on life. Seek professional help if you or your child are experiencing feelings of hopelessness, or chronic negative thinking.
- Allow for self-discovery. There is always something that can be learned from both good and bad experiences.
- Help your child understand that change is a part of life.

**Is your child experiencing challenges with his/her mental health this school year? Here are some of the warning signs!**

- Changes in mood or behavior – anger, sadness, or disinterest lasting for 2 or more weeks.
- Difficulty concentrating – lack of focus, decline in academic performance, poor memory retention, lack of sleep, misplaced items.
- Weight loss or weight gain – loss of appetite, dieting, over-exercising, using laxatives, overeating, or vomiting.
- Detachment- isolation, spending a lot of time alone, little to no interest in being around other people.
- Attachment – children becoming very clingy around parents or caregivers.
- Physical indicators – complaints of frequent headaches or stomachaches.
- Physical harm – self-harming behaviors, inflicting harm on other people or animals.
- Substance abuse – only using substances to cope.

**Take appropriate action.** If your child shows any of these warning signs and you would like more information on mental health providers in your community, please call the Children's of Alabama Psychiatric Intake Response Center at (205) 638-7472. If your child is in immediate danger, always call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. For more information on back-to-school adjustment: please contact Cindy Jones at 205-638-5034 or [Cynthia.jones@childrensal.org](mailto:Cynthia.jones@childrensal.org).