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How to Manage Back to School Anxieties

Blog

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After a long summer of playing and sleeping in, the return to school can often be something many children dread. Often with a motivational chat and some encouragement, most children will see past the dread and begin to get excited to go back to see their friends and have a routine.

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in children as misbehaviour or tiredness. A child with anxiety may display the following behaviours:

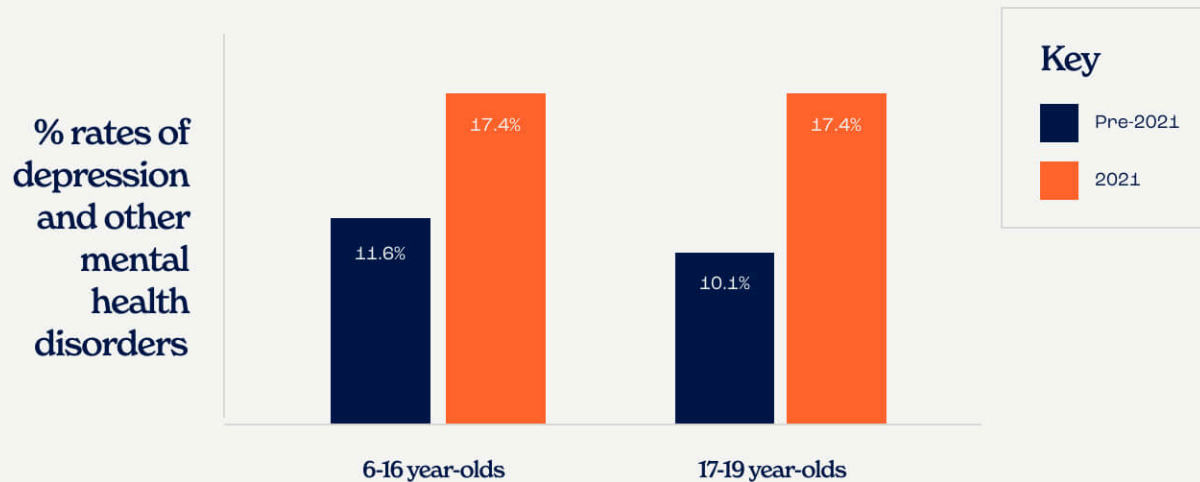


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The pandemic hitting in 2020 meant that children were separated from friends and family and out of school for such long periods of time, which inevitably had a tremendous impact on young children. Numerous [research findings](#) have found that children and young people's mental health and wellbeing has been substantially impacted during the pandemic. In 6 to 16 year olds, rates of depression and other mental health disorders had increased from 11.6% pre-pandemic to 17.4% in 2021, and among 17 to 19 year olds, rates had increased from 10.1% to 17.4%.

Children's mental health & wellbeing



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What is school anxiety/refusal?

Anxiety about going to school is often referred to as '[school refusal](#)' or 'emotionally-based school avoidance' where feelings of worry and stress about school life build up and result in the child becoming reluctant to go to school, or their symptoms of anxiety become so severe they cannot actually attend.

When this becomes the case it is absolutely crucial that parents, caregivers and schools intervene to ensure that the child feels and understands that school is a source of support and community as well as learning. There are so many valuable benefits that come from going to school, such as responsibilities that boost self-esteem, exposure to different opinions, new and exciting experiences, a sense of achievement, friendships and relationships with trusted adults.

Let's take a look at the ways in which parents and caregivers can help to ease feelings of anxiety and worries around going back to school.

1. Check your own feelings

Before trying to tackle your children's feelings, it's important to address whether their stress and worry is a result of your own stresses, subsequently causing them to be distressed. The summer holidays can be a very stressful time, especially as a working parent trying to juggle working, organising childcare, and entertaining the children for 6 weeks, let alone the additional stress of any personal issues at home whether it be financial, relationship or family.

While at the time you may not recognise that your personal stresses could be having an effect on your children, they can pick up on a change in mood very quickly and in some circumstances they

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- Have adult conversations out of reach of your children, if there is information you don't want your children to hear then it is best to ensure the conversations are had out of the house so there isn't the possibility of them overhearing anything they shouldn't
- Avoid taking on too many responsibilities at once, putting pressure on yourself as a parent to get everything done before school starts again can cause additional stress for yourself

2. Take time to listen to their worries

If your children are generally quite quiet, or can be very whiny then it can be difficult to differentiate between whether they're feeling sad and anxious or just being a general nuisance. This is where it is so important to take the time to listen to them and ask them if there is anything troubling them. Providing a safe and open environment for them to open up to you is the most effective way to monitor what – if anything – is troubling them.

It is a good idea to keep to a routine by asking them how they feel every day at the same time, maybe at breakfast or on the way to school, by doing this you won't forget to ask and they know they have a time every day they can chat to you.



Try not to just dismiss their worries by saying 'There's nothing to be worried about' or 'You'll be fine' instead really show that you have listened to them, acknowledging your child's feelings will help them feel more secure. You can boost their self-confidence by helping them to recognise their feelings and provide solutions for handling the things they're concerned about.

Keep in mind that children often want to be able to talk about something they're upset about without expecting you to fix them. Your job is to validate their feelings and demonstrate confidence that they can handle the situation.

3. Get familiar with routine again

Around two weeks before the school term is due to begin, establish a strict bedtime and morning routine getting the children up and ready for the day - even if it is just to lounge on the sofa!



Often schools will set homework tasks over the summer to be completed by the time they return. If they have, make sure everything is completed for the deadlines and put together a plan for any outstanding pieces to make sure they're done and ready to hand in.

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Even if they haven't, it's a good idea to set some weekly tasks for your children to spend just an hour completing once a week. These steps will avoid the return to school coming as a complete shock and making them dread the early mornings and long days.

There are plenty of clubs and courses that students can take part in during the summer holidays, such as our classes held at our Learning Cubs centres in Blackburn, Nelson and Keighley. Being in weekly attendance to our classes, both **throughout school holidays and at weekends**, helps our students to ease back into school quickly and with minimal disruption after the summer break.

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Other things you can do to familiarise your children with getting back to school is to do the journey you will take to school in the week running up to going back, whether it be driving or walking - this can help to ease their anxiety.

4. Lead by example

If the parents or caregivers are unorganised in the run up to going back to school then it will make your children feel unorganised too - which can in turn lead to them worrying that they're not going to be prepared to go back.

Show your children that you are more than prepared for the beginning of the school year by doing the school uniform and stationary shop early, preparing packed lunches and bags the night before the first day back.

It is also important to ensure that conversations around going back to school are positive and joyful ones, reinforcing that school isn't something that your children should dread or be worried about.

5. Implement coping strategies

Work together with your child to identify activities that will help them to express their feelings freely and manage their anxiety. This could be spending time with particular friends, listening to music, reading, playing sports, drawing, cooking or watching a favourite film.

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Some coping strategies that help children to face their worries and anxieties head on often include writing in a 'worry journal' which is essentially just a notebook to note down worries, which can stop them from becoming overwhelming.

The same thing can be done but instead using a 'worry box' where they write down their thoughts and feelings and put the paper into the box to feel as though they are manageable. Carrying something with them from home, such as a key ring or a special photo, may also help to reduce their anxiety.

6. Don't be afraid to seek further help

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school to see if they have a counsellor who can provide emotional support and help your child express and understand their feelings.

If the issue runs a little deeper than not opening up and your children's anxiety about school is affecting them in other ways such as socialising with friends, or in any way at home then it is important to get [professional help](#) quickly by meeting with a medical professional outside of school.

Learning Cubs are here to help

If you're looking for ways to help both yourself and your children for the upcoming school year, Learning Cubs have several learning centres offering [academic support](#) for children of all ages up to 16.

Our teams are dedicated to helping your children succeed, and will always go above and beyond the expected level of support to ensure no child is left behind!

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