

Associated Counseling Professionals
12818 Augusta Av.
Omaha, NE 68144

402-334-1122

acpcounseling@hotmail.com

Back-to-School Stresses

Terry Moore, LCSW

Lots of kids look forward to the return of school. Vacation trips are over, summer jobs have run their course, and new backpacks & clothes yearn to be picked out by earnest shoppers. For the most part, young people are eager to see old school pals, to start sports, and some even look forward to their classes.

On the other hand, it's not that way for everyone. Kids sometimes face school with fear, uncertainty, even hate. Sometimes these get translated into clinging, tummy trouble, or school avoidance. Parents can't totally transform the school experience, but we can make a difference to our children. We can start just by being a bit more available to our kids, maybe being a bit more watchful. Attending open houses, or orientations, can make a big difference. We help our children know that we view them and their school experience as a top priority. We get familiar with the layout of the school, the routine, and the teachers. It helps later when our family members make reference to a class, a teacher, or special challenge in their day -- like getting across the building in four minutes to avoid a tardy demerit.

TRANSITIONS

Making the switch from one level of education to another can be the toughest of times; parents should be ready for those times. Starting kindergarten, moving up to middle school, shifting to high school, and college are the obvious big ones. It's close to the anxiety and uncertainty.

Parents can help by talking with students about their expectations, and to help anticipate trouble. The idea is to help the student gain more confidence by identifying solutions before they are needed. ["What would you do if your locker won't open?"] Parents can make sure that they key in on their child's efforts, and continued demonstration of advancing their mastery and understanding of material. Persistence, follow-through, and seeking help are all skills to identify, encourage, and praise when used.

Remember, too, that each level of school brings new needs and challenges. Middle schoolers will find respite in their friendships, seeking acceptance from peers. It is important to not view this as parental rejection; rather, it is part of this new environment.

FIRM, LOVING GUIDANCE

At some point, parents look for more and more independence or autonomy from their children. This happens especially as students move into their high school years. On the other hand, there will always be times when parents will need to grip the reins tightly, and to give input into a situation. Parents also have the task of continuing to reaffirm boundaries and expectations for behavior.

Some of the main tasks for parents in this area include helping students review all of the options that a son or daughter has -- whether regarding class selections, joining extracurricular activities, or putting in extra hours at a part time job. Within the context of all of those choices, we parents ultimately must draw the line. If a child is expressing a desire to avoid school because of fears, we probably need to firmly remind our child that the expectation is to get to school whenever possible. Most children will discover that most anxieties will dissipate as they get into the flow of the activities of the day. If students are really ill, the school will make arrangements to have them transported home.

PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES

Establish a nighttime routine that assists students in getting ready for the next day.

Make time to listen to what is going on in your child's life at school.

Demonstrate and remind children that facing fears is the best way to overcome the

IF YOU'RE MOVING . . .

Try, when you have a choice, to move at a time when it will not disrupt the school year.

Expect the biggest adjustments with adolescents -- given their emphasis on friends and social acceptance.

Help ease a move for teens by arranging a visit to the new school in advance of the start of the school year, allowing them to familiarize themselves with the new environment, and decrease anxiety.

Be straightforward when explaining the reasons for the move.

Making children part of the moving process will aid them in overall adjustment. Hire a sitter, or enlist friends/family if younger children are underfoot.

After the move, return to typical & routine traditions whenever possible. Get kids enrolled in community-sponsored activities -- and older kids will benefit from school-related fun.

Since 1993, Associated Counseling Professionals has provided outstanding services for individuals, families, and businesses. Our caring, responsive staff includes eight seasoned psychotherapists.

Call us to find out more about how our services can help with your issue or situation.
402-334-1122

acpcounseling@hotmail.com