

News RELEASE

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For Immediate Release:

August 5, 2004

Release No. 04-41

Starting School: Tips for Parents

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In the coming weeks, millions of children will start school for the first time. For most, this will be an exciting and positive experience. However, it also represents a major transition, which can be challenging for some children.

Parents, teachers, and other caring adults can help reduce the anxiety associated with starting school. The following are specific suggestions:

1. Spend time talking to kids about school before classes begin. Describe what school will be like and what will happen throughout the day.
2. Bring kids to visit the school in advance. If possible, show them their classroom and other important landmarks, such as the playground, lunchroom, and the rest room.
3. Let kids know that it is OK to feel nervous or worried when starting school. Reassure them that everyone feels a little anxious when they do things for the first time.
4. Help kids establish a regular routine to get ready for school. Let them participate in making choices about what to wear, what to have for breakfast, or what to bring for lunch.
5. If kids are particularly anxious, consider sending a small reminder of home, such as a photograph of the family or a picture of a favorite pet.
6. Arrange for kids to spend time with classmates outside the school. Having friends always reduces school anxiety.
7. Spend time talking to kids about what happened in school. Chances are they'll have many stories. Give kids plenty of positive feedback about their new experiences.

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Anxiety about starting school usually passes within the first few days or weeks. However, if kids are having excessive difficulties (e.g., problems sleeping, frequent temper tantrums, reluctance or refusal to go to school, etc.), further evaluation and/or consultation may be needed. Talk to your child's teacher and/or family doctor. If difficulties persist, consider a referral to a trained and qualified mental health professional.

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The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society, founded in 1844, whose more than 35,000 physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. For more information, visit the APA Web site at www.psych.org.

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