

Can you believe it? It feels as though summer vacation just started, and now we are almost halfway through August. It is time to be getting ready for school to start again. Last-minute summer activities are happening. Schools are making supply lists available. The back-to-school sales are in full swing.

Whether your child is starting school for the first time, changing teachers or schools, or returning to a familiar teacher, the start of a new school year signifies change. It can be exciting, but also frightening. Your child may be scared, anxious, or resistant to start the new school year. What are some things that can be done to help ease the transition from summer vacation to school time? Below are a few suggestions that may make the transition smoother.

### **Unstructured to Structured Day**

Summer may be a time of fewer commitments with less need of a schedule. Often morning and nighttime routines are more relaxed or completely set aside. School means waking up and going to bed at a regular time to ensure your student is at school on time and rested enough to perform at his or her best. Once at school, your student has a regular class schedule with regularly scheduled breaks and meals. You can help your student prepare for this change by gradually shifting waking up and going to bed to more regular times, as well as trying to have meals at or around the same time each day. Try moving scheduled activities at home by 10-15 minutes each day until your student's schedule is similar to a regular school schedule.

### **Morning and nighttime routines**

This can be tough for many adults, let alone for children. However, the day can start and end better when it is clear what needs to be done to successfully get from bed to school or to transition from school back to bed. A written or picture schedule can be a very helpful tool. And the occupational therapy practitioner can assist parent and child with creating a schedule and break it down into steps that are manageable for the family and student. Once a schedule is created, practice is key to making the day go smoother.

### **Visit the school**

Check with your student's school about the possibility of visiting the school, so your student can learn where his or her classroom, lunch room, gym, and even recess areas are. Knowing what the school looks like and where things are can help ease any fear or anxiety your child may face regarding the upcoming school year.

### **Meet the teacher and school administrators**

Not only can it be helpful for your student to know who the teachers and other school personnel are and reduce anxiety, but it is also helpful for you, the parent, to talk to them. Give them some insight into the strengths and struggles your student may experience, as well as things that have worked in the past to help your student succeed. Does your child struggle with strange smells, bright lights, or being in crowds? Is it difficult for your child to transition from one activity to another? With your input, they can develop a plan to facilitate improved school participation, academically and socially.

Ask them to let you know, after the first few days, how things are going. Open the lines of communication with the school. The staff want to see your child succeed in school. They will appreciate your insight, so they can implement a plan that will create the best school experience possible for your student.

### **Choose comfortable clothes**

Give your student the opportunity to choose clothes that are comfortable to wear to school. Make sure they are washed, so they are as soft as possible. Things like tags can be very itchy. So, if they are uncomfortable for your child, go ahead and remove them. Then, have your student wear them before school starts to make sure they are comfortable enough and will not be a distraction during the school day.

There are so many distractions and potential anxiety-inducing incidents that can happen in everyday life and at school. There is no single “fix” for every student. Preparing your child for the upcoming transition and being open with school staff about your concerns can go a long way towards facilitating a successful transition to the new school year. We are also here at Lifespan to advise and support you and your student.