

Battling Back to School Anxiety

by Steven Wilson, Ed.D.



Back to School 2020 does not look like anything ever seen for school-age children across the country.

According to a [recent survey by Deloitte](#), nearly seven of 10 parents are reporting anxiety over sending their kids back to school.

The survey found, in the Midwestern region of the U.S. including Ohio, 66 percent of parents are unsure how school will start, 74 percent are concerned about their personal or

familial health due to COVID-19, 26 percent are worried about paying for back-to-school expenses and 50 percent expect the economy to further weaken in the next six months.

These worrisome factors felt by parents can easily affect their kids who may already be anxious about returning to school. Behavioral health experts from The Children's Home offer advice, tips and tools for parents and caregivers to ease anxiety many families are feeling.

"The most important thing we can do for our kids is to reflect calm when they are with us," said Dr. Joseph Rieman, medical director of The Children's Home. "Young minds are very impressionable. It's okay to communicate that, like them, we are anxious about the unknowns. However, it's also critical to emphasize the things we can control."

Dr. Rieman said it is helpful to point out what actions kids can take for their own safety, keeping in mind their development and age. Hand washing, proper mask wearing, maintaining social distance, using hand sanitizer, and other safety measures are all actions that anyone can take and can help kids feel they have some control over their well-being.

And, he says, adults should model that behavior.

"I think a lot of parents will tell you that kids observe more than some people might think," he said. "It's vital we set the example and emulate the same precautions we're asking of them."

Debbie Gingrich, vice president of behavioral health by The Children's Home, said back to school anxiety is understandable considering what the last few months have meant for parents and students alike.

“Circumstances dictated that our kids’ school year ended in an unanticipated manner this past spring,” she said. “Then many kids remained at home for an extended period due to safety reasons. Schools across the nation are making real-time adjustments and parents are trying to keep families afloat and kids safe.

“It’s a lot for anyone,” said Gingrich.

Gingrich said parents and caregivers could consider some of the following tips to help ease back to school anxiety as much as reasonably possible.

- Get excited about the return to learning. If parents are enthusiastic about the new school year, kids are more apt to see school in a positive light.



- If a child vocalizes anxiety, don’t dismiss it. Have those conversations. Emphasize that masks, social distancing, and hand washing are part of the equation for now. If you think their anxiety is potentially harmful or having an adverse impact on their health, [talk to a therapist](#).
- Set routines. Practice an age appropriate bedtime as well as wake-up time before school starts. Pack lunches or backpacks the day before and place them near the front door.
- Cut back on electronic screen time. Check out this [handy infographic](#).
- Communicate and set the tone. “It’s okay to tell our kids we don’t know what the future holds either, but we do know a lot of people are working very hard to ensure we all stay safe,” Gingrich said.

The Children’s Home has had children on campus throughout the summer and has adopted stringent safety protocols. John Banchy, president and CEO of The Children’s Home said the safety measures adopted by the agency make him proud and optimistic.

“We’ve laid a groundwork to keep our clients and staff as safe as possible,” he said. “None of our programs have reported an ill student or staff member. Our protocols and safety measures implemented by our staff, in many ways, were even more assiduous than the guidance laid out by state authorities.”



The Children’s Home’s first day of school is scheduled for August 20 and will operate on a normal five-day academic week. The agency has implemented modified and stringent safety procedures and remote options for when in-person sessions are not possible.

“Our in-person care includes social distancing, increased hand washing, hand sanitizer in multiple locations, temperature checks, masks and a myriad of other things that are now part of our daily vernacular and campus-based protocols,” Banchy said.

