



Back to School Prep



WHY PREP?

When people experience new, and unfamiliar things it can feel scary.

They might wonder, "Am I safe?"

Children/adolescents who are returning to school, might be worried because they have been at home for a long time, school might look different with COVID safety measures, and they might worry about getting sick. Preparation helps things feel familiar and safe, helping children/adolescents to feel safe and secure.



START A SCHOOL ROUTINE

Creating and following routines helps people to feel safe and secure. August is a great time to begin to transition from the summer routine to the school routine. Begin by changing wakeup/bedtimes, then mealtimes and a before and after school routine. Try to stay consistent with the routine so your child/adolescent can predict what will happen next.

CHECK IN WITH YOURSELF

When children go back to school it often means changes for everyone in the family. Caregivers may need to change their routine and may have their own excitement, fears and concerns about their child going to school. Make time to check in about your feelings, find trusted sources to get your questions answered, and take some time to take care of yourself!

USE SAFETY BASED MESSAGING

We often use or hear language such as, "It's not safe" or "It's dangerous" or "So you don't get sick." While the intention behind those messages is good, a person's brain hears that things are unsafe, dangerous, and unhealthy, which can make them feel anxious. Try using safety based messaging to create safety and decrease anxiety, such as "Washing our hands and wearing our masks keeps us healthy" or "School has things in place so you stay safe."

BE PRESENT

Caregivers want to protect their child/adolescent, and often wish they had the perfect thing to say or the solution to their child/adolescent's problem. This can put a lot of pressure on caregivers. The good news is that it is more important how you respond, than what you say. When your child/adolescent is talking remove distractions, be empathetic, have clear, consistent responses, and actively listen. Reflect back to them what you think you heard and ask for any clarifications. These skills help children/adolescents to feel safe, connected, and heard. They will help them know they can come to you with problems, questions, and feelings and that you can support them.



NOTICE, NAME AND VALIDATE FEELINGS

Understanding how we are feeling and why we are feeling that way helps people to feel in control. Try using the attunement steps with children/adolescents to help them feel in control, safe, and secure.

- Notice: Take a moment to notice how your child/adolescent is feeling. Take a moment to notice how you are feeling and take a few deep breaths if you need to calm down.
- Name: Name the feeling you believe your child/adolescent is having. "It seems like you are worried" or "I wonder if you're upset."
- Validate: This is the most important part, as it helps people to feel seen, and creates safety and connection. Validate the feeling, not the behavior. "It makes sense you are feeling that way" or "When that happens I feel... too."
- Respond: Offer a choice to help them calm down, or ask, "Is there anything I can do to help?"

