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## **MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS**

### **Back-to-School Blues – Helping Your Child Cope with School Anxiety By AUA University Counseling Center**

Returning to school after the summer break can be an exciting time for students. There is the excitement of being in a new grade, learning new subjects, playing sports or participating in the arts, meeting new teachers, and making new friends. Yet, returning to school can also be stressful; a time of fear and worry for those students experiencing emotional anxiety about school.

Students fearful or anxious about returning to school may exhibit physical symptoms such as trouble sleeping at night, nausea, stomach problems, and/or headaches. The fears may stem from the beliefs that they may be negatively evaluated, asked to perform in front of others, or rejected or bullied by their peers. Other students may also appear distressed when having to separate from their parents to attend school. They may exhibit signs of separation anxiety. They may refuse to go to school due to worry about their parents not being with them or fears of an unforeseen event happening, such as getting lost or becoming ill. For other students, signs of social anxiety may become evident, such as worrying about going to lunch, participating in class, walking in the hallways, or simply having conversations with others. More serious signs to look out for, according to the National Alliance for Mental Health (NAMI), are children being “increasingly more socially withdrawn, missing multiple days of school, falling behind academically, and expressing interest in harming themselves (*this requires immediate attention*).”

School stress is *not* a new phenomenon. According to the NAMI, “At least 1 in 5 school-aged children is affected by a mental health condition. The two most common conditions among children and adolescents are anxiety followed by depression.” Thus, it is important for parents to support the mental wellbeing of their children by looking out for the previously mentioned signs of school anxiety. According to the Mental Health Coalition, mental wellbeing can be described as “a sense of emotional and cognitive wellness that is fueled by feelings of belonging, safety, and meaning in one’s life.”

Parents can begin to support the mental wellbeing of their children by having conversations with their children on their developmental level. Parents should normalize any fears and acknowledge and accept any mixed emotions presented; allowing their children to share their hopes, worries, dreams, and fears without judgement. Parents can also share their own stories of how they felt about going to school and how they coped with their own school problems. If children are refusing to go to school, parents should reach out to the school counselor or their child’s pediatrician to avoid a long-term school refusal problem. The longer parents allow their children to stay out of school, the harder it is to get them to return to school.

The good news is that PARENTS MATTER! Parents play an important role in supporting their children’s emotional wellbeing. Help is also available in the schools and in the community. Let’s be the village our children need.

Check out these helpful resources for parents and students:

- Youth and Adult Mental Health Resources –



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- Mental Health School Supplies – <https://www.crisistextline.org/teens-toolkit/>
- Roadmap to Back to School Mental Health for Parents – <https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Kids-Teens-and-Young-Adults/Youth-and-Young-Adult-Resources>  
<https://www.thementalhealthcoalition.org/backtoschool/>
- Back to School Mental Wellness Checklist – <https://www.yourmomcares.org/back-to-school-checklist22>