

## Sarah Mallard Wakefield, MD

How can parents help their kids mentally prepare for going back to school?

00:06

Well, you know, transitions can be a really exciting time, but they can also be an anxiety provoking time. And I think it's really important to know how your kiddo tends to respond to transitions. And if they get really excited, that can be great, you can talk to them about how exciting it is to go back to school and seeing their friends and things like that. But if you see that your kiddo is one who has some difficulty with transitions and tends to be more anxious, then I think that's a sign to do a little bit more preparation. And some things that you can do for preparation is talking about what the school day will look like, when you'll get up what you'll laying out clothes before the day, picking out those things, trying to make it exciting and fun, what they're going to eat for lunch that they get to, to make those choices. But also, you may have a kiddo who really needs you to do additional preparatory work, meaning maybe visiting the school or really looking at which door they're going to go into if there's a meet the teacher night or an opportunity to go into the school, even before or without all of those kids that meet the teacher, to see what the hallways look like or which classroom they'll be in, that can be really helpful for helping them think about the day and think about some transitional struggles they might have during that first day or that first week as well. And then as a parent, you can help them problem solve those ahead of time.

What mental health issues may arise during the new school year for students?

01:41

So various things arise with the new school year. There are anxieties related to those transitions. You know, this year in particular, there are a lot of anxieties related to uncertainty, you know, what is what are the rules going to be? What, how am I going to be protected from COVID-19? Who might be sick, will I get sick, those types of things.

(gap)

Bullying is also something you know, that that kids, especially if they've experienced before, might be anxious or worried about happening, or as it's happening, you might see that they are feeling more isolated and alone and frustrated.

With the pandemic, is there an increased level of anxiety and stress for kids?

02:30

I think the pandemic definitely causes an increased level of anxiety and stress for us all. And that kiddos get that both thinking about it for themselves, but in hearing and seeing what their parents are struggling with and the questions their parents are trying to answer. I think this year as opposed to last year for a lot of people is an additional brings in additional anxiety. There is you know, most kiddos especially kiddos in Texas are going back to school in person. But it's the guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics and from the CDC. Talk about masking and I think there's a lot of questions about who's going to be wearing masks at school and who's vaccinated and, and kids are going to be struggling answering those questions for themselves.

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### How might kids have regular mental health checks?

03:25

I think it's very important to regularly check in about your mental health. And parents can help children with this by first observing, observing if they see any changes in their child and their mood or behavior. (gap)

I think it's important also for parents to check in with their child's teacher, see how things are going during the school day and what they might be seeing in that dimension and that domain, then you can brainstorm together, what kind of supports could be implemented both at school and at home? There are lots of things that can be done just in the classroom to support a child and to say, you know, hey, I recognize that you're not feeling great, or can we check in and about this? I think you're doing a great job, or can you help me with this task. But I do think that it sometimes we need to involve school counselors or the school administrators depending on what that setup is at the school. And luckily, in our region, we have a school based mental health program that we facilitate from our department with 88 independent school districts in the area. Where if a counselor and a family is concerned about a child that they can make a referral to our program and have pretty immediate pretty quick access to mental health team to do assessments and link with a child psychiatrist, child psychologists licensed professional counselor or social worker as needed. So we really want to respond as quickly as possible. When we intervene early, we can intervene less and really prevent a child from struggling as much at school and at home.

### Anything else to add about kids and their mental health?

05:11

I think it's important to remember that kids are really resilient. They just need to feel seen and be supported. And many times, most times, they do get better and they feel better. But I think it's also really important to remember that most mental health conditions present before a child is 18. So over 50%, of mental health conditions that we see in adults present during childhood. And so there are real struggles that kiddos have and real reasons to seek intervention. And so as a parent and a teacher and a child, you're always trying to figure out, you know, am I responding to a stressor, and this too shall pass, or am I struggling with a mental health condition and I really need some appropriate treatment. So we really want to make sure we're doing those assessments as early as possible to support our kids and families.