



PARADIGM
TREATMENT



PARADIGM TREATMENT TIPS

5 Ways to Support Your Teen Through This Year's

BACK-TO-SCHOOL ANXIETY

Back-to-school has always been a nerve-wracking time for teens and parents alike. This year COVID-19 has drastically amplified our stress, as our once normal routines and schedules are turned completely upside down.

Starting in the fall, schools, teachers, and students will face unparalleled difficulties. With so much uncertainty looming ahead, many teens may grapple with heightened mental health issues such as anxiety and depression as school returns.

Adolescent life can be challenging enough without the additional burden of a global pandemic. Considering the significant additional strain being placed on students and their families, your household may experience complicated and turbulent emotions.

In order to best prepare your teen for the fall, and for the many stressful unknowns they face, it's imperative to support them in meaningful ways.

Here are 5 Ways to Support Your Teen Through This Year's Back-to-School Anxiety so they can develop healthy coping skills for use both in the classroom and beyond.

1. Teach Them Emotional Awareness

Developing emotional awareness is the key to coping with stress. Emotional awareness is the skill of knowing what you are feeling, why you're feeling it, and what physical sensations you are having as a result.

This is a skill that can be cultivated over time and that allows you to identify and express what you are feeling moment by moment. It empowers you to gain clarity on the relationship between what you are feeling and how you choose to behave.

Emotional awareness involves the ability to recognize your moment-to-moment emotional experience and handle emotions without becoming overwhelmed.

The best way to teach your teen emotional awareness is to explain what it means and practice it at home. Parents can help their teens with this by asking:

*How do you feel about that?
What was your first reaction?
What fears or anxieties are getting in your way?*

In other words, you can support the discussion of feelings into your conversations.



2. Healthy Diet

There is evidence that the foods we eat can directly impact our moods. One reason is that eating the correct foods can actually help the brain build up their strength.

This means that the tissues, enzymes, and neurotransmitters in the brain can become healthier and more efficient when nutritious foods are eaten.

The result, of course, is that by eating foods with a lot of refined sugars and saturated fats can negatively impact the brain.

When your teen eats food, the first place it goes is to his or her stomach and intestines. You might be surprised to know that serotonin, which is a “feel good” substance, is produced mostly in the gastrointestinal tract.

Taking probiotics or eating foods that naturally contain probiotics (such as kefir, yogurt, and sauerkraut) can improve not only your overall health but also your mental health.

Notoriously, B vitamins are known for reducing inflammation and improving mood and overall health. Some products, like cereals and bread, are enriched with B vitamins. Food high in vitamin B include:

- *Meat*
- *Eggs*
- *Dairy products*
- *Legumes*
- *Leafy green vegetables*

In other words, you can support the discussion of feelings into your conversations.

Have Them Keep a Food Diary



One way to encourage your teen to make better choices is to ask your teen to keep a food diary. Have them write down what they eat and how they feel emotionally. This might show them some patterns and cause them to discover that they feel more energetic and positive on days that they eat better foods.

Eat Clean With Them



You could also make a deal to try to eat clean with your teen for two weeks. This means that you avoid processed foods and refined sugars. If you're doing it together, it can be less overwhelming to your teen than simply being handed a list of foods to eat and avoid. Both of you might be surprised at how much better you feel when the time period is up, and you might decide to continue eating that way.

3. The Power of Sleep

If your teen has been staying up late and/or sleeping in, the first day back to school can feel overwhelming and exhausting.

Plan ahead to get your child into gear for their first day back by gradually rolling back the bedtime and getting up a little earlier each day for a week or so before your child returns to school.

Teens need at least 9 hours of sleep each night. Because of the many physical, emotional, social, and psychological changes they are going through, they need the rest.

Yet, if your teen is having trouble sleeping, then you may need to support them in getting a good night's rest.

Some tips to help your teen achieve good sleep are:

- Get daily exercise
- Create a comfortable, tranquil sleeping space
- Start a bedtime ritual with reading, a cup of tea, or anything relaxing
- Avoid screens an hour before bed
- Avoid caffeine



4. Work With Your Child

After months of being off the school bandwagon, going straight into classwork may be overwhelming.

Set aside time to go through your teen's responsibilities, projects, and tasks and offer your support rather than your pressure. That way, they will feel safe asking for help when they need it.

Sit down and go through assignments with your teen. By showing solidarity to help them with projects or problems earnestly, it may help with the anxieties of pressure.

If they need help, provide it, and encourage them to practice until they become confident in answering the question or fully grasp the subject.

If your child is assigned to read a book, make it a fun family book club by reading the same book with them and having discussions about the chapters.

If they're having trouble focusing on concepts, try thinking outside the box by going on a walk together or stepping away from the computer.

Simple acts of letting your teen know you support their success will go a long way.

5. Validate Their Feelings

One of the greatest ways we can help teenagers and young adults at this time of uncertainty is to validate their feelings. To feel scared or confused is perfectly normal, and trying to make them feel any other way could be a harmful act of suppression.

Instead of pacifying their feelings by saying, “Everything will be alright.”, it’s important to acknowledge that it makes SENSE for them to feel anxious about the future or going back to school.

Explain to your teen that we are living in historic times. Inform them that the last time there was a pandemic of this magnitude it was 100 years ago with the Spanish Flu of 1918.

We survived that one and we will find a way to survive this one too. Although we don’t have all the answers now, each of us plays a crucial role in being part of the solution.

By encouraging your teen to do their part with good hygiene and social distancing practices, you are arming them with the knowledge they need to feel safe and in control of their immediate health.

When you empathize with your teen and validate their feelings as normal, you are allowing them to cope with these complicated, high-stress emotions.



Conclusion

No matter what your family's back to school process will look like, it's imperative to support your kids with compassion during these unprecedented and unpredictable times.

Since COVID-19 has impacted the entire world, the mental health impacts are just as serious as the physical impacts. By nurturing your family's back-to-school process with these 5 helpful tips, your teens will be able to cope more effectively with whatever the fall brings.

For more information on Paradigm Treatment programs and resources for teen mental health, please visit our website or contact us at (866) 773-7422.

www.paradigmatreatment.com

