



MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FROM ATLANTIC BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

BACK TO SCHOOL | AUGUST 2022

Supporting Good Mental Health as We Prepare for Back to School

School supplies, schedules, carpool, sneakers... is mental health on your checklist?

No one really wants to think about getting back to school in August! But that school bell always rings faster than we expect and helping kids adjust can be challenging. With a few preparations it can make things easier for everyone.

The two previous years during COVID-19 put additional stress on parents and kids returning to school. Studies have shown that the pandemic had a serious impact on the mental health of children, teens, and parents. Families may still be adjusting to all the upheaval, worries and fears came with home school, wearing masks and getting used to going back to the classroom. Families and schools have made many adjustments so that kids can learn and stay healthy and be safe.



As we prepare for a new school year, National Association on Mental Illness (NAMI) reminds us that mental health is more important now than ever. Remember to acknowledge the many emotions you, your children, students, your loved ones or your colleagues may be experiencing; **normalize the conversation around mental health with those around you**; and make an intentional effort to ask how those around you are doing. And, in return, be honest about how you are doing. By normalizing these conversations and modelling vulnerability, you can **reduce stigma** and help others feel more comfortable sharing.

Take some time with you family to reflect and prepare for the year ahead.

- Ask your kids what they remember about the past school years during COVID. What did they learn about themselves? This is a chance to reflect on their strengths! Include drawing and storytelling.
- Can they recall what they liked and did not like about remote learning?
- What lessons will help them be resilient as they prepare to return to school this year?



Let's Talk Out Loud About Mental Health!

Children don't always have the words to tell you how they feel. Returning to school is an opportunity to help them find the words to express the range of emotions they may be having. Parents can help by prompting them and teaching new feeling words...

- "You might be feeling **"excited"** about going to school"
- "Sometimes we can feel two feelings at once. Do you feel **happy** to see your friends and also maybe **nervous** about meeting your new teacher?"
- "It's ok to feel a little **worried** when starting the new school year

What Can Parents Do?

Connect with other parents who have children in the same program who can provide information and make them more comfortable with the program.

Talk with teachers about the best way to separate from their child at the start of the day—brief goodbyes are often best.

Try to stay calm and reassuring during transition—using a calm voice, with a relaxed face and body to let their child know that they wouldn't leave them if the child were not safe and protected.

Take [care of themselves during stressful times](#) so they can be better equipped to take care of others.

Find resources to learn how to [promote resilience and reduce anxiety](#).

Remember that this is a phase—building new relationships is a skill, and with support, children can be resilient. Even if it's hard to separate, they will gain a new trusted relationship with their new teacher and feel more secure.

What Can Parents with Concerns Do?

Make sure their child has a daily, predictable routine, with regular times for healthy meals, naps, and night sleep at home. Having a rested body and knowing what to expect at home helps children cope.

[Monitor their child's developmental milestones and learn what to do if there are concerns.](#)

Talk to a health care professional if their child's symptoms of anxiety or behaviour problems are severe or persistent.

Contact a mental health care professional for [parent training and support](#) so parents can help their child.

Find [resources for themselves if they are sad, worried, or stressed](#).

For children with new concerns that persist, ask the school for an evaluation to see if the child may need [special education services or accommodations](#). [icon](#) For children with identified disabilities, ask the program to review their Individualized Education Program (IEP). [COVID-19 pandemic: Helping young children and parents transition back to school | CDC](#)

For Young Children....

A special object from home (transitional object) can help with separation, they help kids to hold a piece of their caregiver with them even when they are not together.

It is also important that caregivers check in with their own emotions and levels of anxiety. Young children pick up on our stress and worries, we can help them during these moments by labelling our feelings and modelling a strategy (E.g., "Mom's feeling a little worried right now, I am going to take five (5) big deep breaths to help the worry leave my body")

Create fun and comforting rituals around transition points in the day. This gives structure and comfort for everyone.

[COVID-19 pandemic: Helping young children and parents transition back to school | CDC](#)

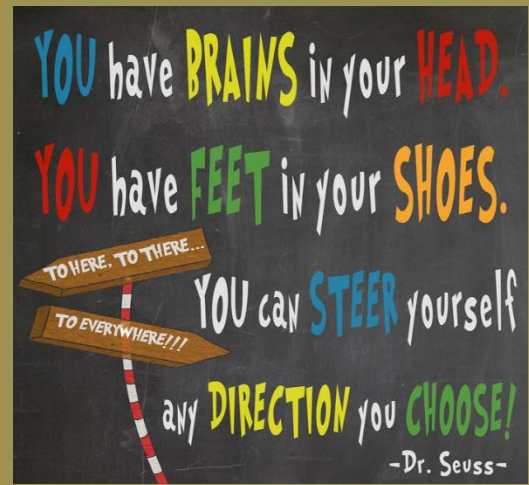


The New "Normal"

The new normal is that there is no normal! Each new beginning is our chance to reinvent and create a better world. We cannot re-write the chapters of history already past, but we can learn from them, evolve and adapt. The new normal may even be a better normal.

Heading back to work or school may feel like chaos, but instead try and reframe those emotions. **You have built resilience!** You can take a step back and approach your work and family life from a fresh perspective. Look at it as an opportunity to set boundaries, enjoy connecting with loved ones and practicing self care.

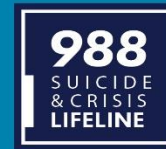
Encourage kids to understand how they have built resilience and **can adapt to new things, cope with big emotions, and find ways to achieve their goals** in many different ways and under many different circumstances.



*Ask yourself, what are the positives of the new situations you are finding yourself in?
How do you continue to create "new normal (s)" that are even better than the one before?*

Self-Care Tips for Good Mental Health

- **Three-Part Check in:**
 - Check in with your body
 - Check in with your emotional state
 - Check in with where your thoughts are going
- Challenge yourself to **stay connected** to loved ones and community
- **Remember the basics:**
 - Good sleep
 - Good food
 - Exercise
- **Self-Care is not selfish** it is necessary!
- **Consult with your primary care provider** if you have concerns about your mental health



Starting July 16th, 988 will be a universal entry point so that no matter where you live in the U.S., you can easily access 24/7 emotional support.

In the meantime, please continue to share 1-800-273-TALK (8255) to be connected with a trained, caring counselor.

We're here for you.

Atlantic Behavioral Health ACCESS Center:
888-247-1400
Atlantic Behavioral Health Crisis Intervention Services 24/7 Hotlines:

Chilton Medical Center: 973 – 831 – 5078
Hackettstown Medical Center 908 – 454 – 5141
Morristown Medical Center: 973 – 540 – 0100
Overlook Medical Center: 908 – 522 – 3586
Newton Medical Center: 973 – 383 – 0973

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