

# Transition tips for kids

THE beginning of the school year can stir up strong emotions. Some students are excited about returning to the classroom, while others are filled with stress and anxiety. The way those emotions are addressed at home can set the tone for the rest of the year.

“It’s important for parents to be thinking about how to help their kids gradually make that transition,” says Kari Deschambault, a mental-health clinician with Kidthink Children’s Mental Health Centre in Winnipeg.

Kidthink opened in early 2019 and provides mental illness treatment and outreach services for kids aged 12 and under.

“Seventy per cent of mental illness has its onset in early childhood and adolescence, so that’s why it’s important to focus on those earlier age groups,” she says.

Below are some practical tips from Deschambault for prioritizing mental well-being during a particularly stressful time of year:

## **Return to regular programming early**

Summer vacation usually means a departure from structured daily routines. Since kids thrive on predictability, Deschambault suggests getting back to a regular sleep and meal schedule one to two weeks before the first day of school.

## **Strive for a balanced schedule**

School and extra-curricular activities often go hand-in-hand. When signing up for piano lessons and sports teams, leave room on the calendar for downtime. “Unstructured play is usually how kids de-stress,” she says. “If they’re involved in too many activities, they can get stressed and fatigued and that can really contribute to a deterioration in mental health.”

## **Make room for mental health**

Give kids space to talk about their thoughts and feelings about heading back to school. If they’re anxious, visiting the schoolyard or meeting with

the teacher before classes start can help calm those nerves.

## **Encourage a growth mindset**

Focusing on grades can take away from a student’s enjoyment of school. Instead, try praising their work effort, problem-solving and creativity. It’s also important to help kids understand that failure is a natural part of the growth and learning process.

## **Practise facing fears**

Kids aren’t immune to social anxiety. If your child is worried about making friends and meeting new people, it can help to remind them that their classmates are likely feeling the same way. Deschambault says the only way to overcome this and other kinds of anxiety is to face fears head on — the outcome is never as bad as what’s been imagined and avoidance only leads to more anxiety.

— *Eva Wasney*