

5 Tips For Managing Anxieties around Distance Learning

Back-to-school time is anxiety-inducing even without the backdrop of a global crisis. Many families have had to forego rituals like shopping for school supplies or school clothes, instead focusing on computer and internet access, figuring out distance learning platforms, and wondering whether you need to pack a lunch for your child, or whether you can arrange your online work demands to accommodate a lunchbreak at 11:30 am.



Stress levels for parents and kids have increased this Fall, and there's a heightened need to focus not only on our children's social connections and emotional resiliency, but also on our own self-care. Here are some strategies to manage the increased levels of worry and stress.

1. Prepare, but be flexible: Teachers and schools are also managing unprecedented levels of stress. There may be schedule changes, internet access issues, "zoom bombers", and an adjustment to online instruction. You may find that a student who wanted to work in their bedroom, might not be able to focus there. Be flexible and responsive in case the learning/homework options or the instructional delivery methods change.
2. Team up with the school: Despite school being online, your student's teachers, counselors, and administrators are still an integral part of the team working to make your child's year a success. Help your child learn to self-advocate if they are older, and step in early if they are younger, to set up a strengths-based approach that reduces anxiety and stress.
3. Empower your child: Helping your child develop strategies to deal with feelings of anxiety and stress is a powerful tool. Keep friendships and social connections going, even if they are predominantly happening online.

Here are some elementary-age books that may help your child manage their worries and fears in a productive, thoughtful, and kid-friendly way.

- *When My Worries Get Too Big—A Relaxation Book for Children Who Live with Anxiety* by Kari Dunn Baron (Kinder)
- *What to Do When You Worry Too Much— A Kids Guide to Overcoming Anxiety* by Dawn Huebner (Ages 6-12)

4. Connect with other parents: You can be sure there are other parents dealing with these same concerns. Join the parent group at your school, find an online support network, or connect online (or in a physically-distanced way) with friends and family. Our social networks are even more important during this time of isolation and distancing from our community.

5. Be kind to yourself: You are doing the best you can. Take time to do what nurtures you. You will benefit as well as your child. Remember, getting through this pandemic is going to be a marathon, not a sprint. For every bad day, there will be good ones, and for every two steps forward, there may be one step back. Worries, anxiety, and stress can become less intrusive with persistence, skill-development, and love.

As always, if you need additional support or guidance, reach out to our clinical and consultation experts anytime.