

Suicide prevention at Lake Tahoe: Dealing with back-to-school anxiety

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Children and teens may experience alternating feelings of excitement and anxiety when going back to school.

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WHAT TO DO

If someone you know exhibits warning signs of suicide:

Do not leave the person alone

Remove any firearms, alcohol, drugs or sharp objects that could be used in a suicide attempt

Call the U.S. National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (8255)*

Take the person to an emergency room or seek help from a medical or mental health professional

Learn more: Visit tahoelifeline.org for more information about the Tahoe Truckee Suicide Prevention Coalition.

With the 2016 -2017 school year rapidly approaching, elementary through high schools students are gearing up for a new start.

Many children and teens experience alternating feelings of excitement along with anxiety and fear about going back to school.

Who will be my new teachers? Will any of my friends be in my class? Will my classes be hard? Who will I hang out with at lunch? What if I miss the bus? What if I can't understand the new school work?

Parents can assist their children in coping with anxiety by managing their emotions, building resilience, and by providing an environment that encourages children to share and express their feelings about returning to school. Below are some ideas:

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TRANSITION YOUR SCHEDULE

Changing sleep routines before the first week of school can help to avoid the shock of waking up early. At least one week prior to the start of school, get your child started on a school-day routine, which may include laying out clothes the night before, waking up, eating breakfast and going to bed early.

Stress is much easier to cope with when everyone is rested and fed. Take a trial run of the route to school or bus stop and be clear about what location to catch or exit the bus. Have a conversation about bus safety and expectations for riding the bus.

Plan ahead by stocking the refrigerator with nutritious snacks. Have backpacks, binder and lunch supplies organized at home to make the morning go smoothly.

ENCOURAGE CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUR CHILDREN

Let your children know you are aware change can be exciting and sometimes stressful and you are there to help. Let your child know that it is normal to have concerns and encourage them to share their thoughts.

You can even go as far as setting a regular time and place to talk. Some children may want your undivided attention, while teens may prefer some sort of distraction such as talking while driving in the car or taking a walk.

ENCOURAGE PROBLEM SOLVING WITH YOUR CHILD INSTEAD OF GIVING REASSURANCE

If your child is seeking reassurance to calm their anxiety, do not assure them “Everything will be fine” or “Don’t worry.” Walk your child through the scenario that is causing them concern.

For example, “If this happens, what could you do?” When you coach children to solve the problem by themselves, they gain greater confidence in their ability to handle the situation.

FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE

Children recognize how their parents are feeling. You may be experiencing your own anxiety about waking up earlier, your child starting a new school, or getting everyone out the door on time.

Pay attention to your own behavior and model confidence your child can follow. Re-direct your child’s attention away from anxiety and towards the positive.

Ask your child, “What excites you most about the first day of school?” Most children will think of something good, even if it’s a special treat at the end of the day.

If back to school anxiety doesn’t subside within a month or two or if the anxiety is affecting their daily functioning, it may be time for professional help.

Talk with your child’s teacher or school counselor for their suggestions and support. Seek outside counseling if needed.

Lisa Stekert is the facilitator for the Tahoe Truckee Suicide Prevention Coalition and Outreach Coordinator for the Tahoe Truckee Prevention Task Force. Contact her at lstekert@tfhd.org or by calling 530-582-6733.



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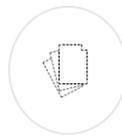


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