

Transitioning Back to School or Early Child Education

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Ursula Phoenix Weir] Welcome. I'm your host Ursula Phoenix Weir. Heading back to the classroom or early child education can be challenging, especially during a pandemic. But there are things parents and teachers can do to make this transition easier. Joining me today is Dr. Karen Remley, director of CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities and a pediatrician. Welcome Dr. Remley.

[Karen Remley] Thank you Ursula.

[Ursula Phoenix Weir] Dr. Remley what are some of the unique challenges facing children this year as they head back to school?

[Karen Remley] While some schools have been open this last year for in-person classes, others have been virtual. This means many children will be getting on buses and spending days in classrooms soon for the first time in over a year. And many babies who were born just before or during the pandemic may have stayed home rather than starting an early care and education program. For these children and their parents or caregivers, the early care and education programs may be a new experience.

[Ursula Phoenix Weir] Dr. Remley, we know transitions can be hard for children and families. What are some of the specific issues that children and parents might be facing this year?

[Karen Remley] Any change in a child's life is both a challenge and an opportunity. Young children are often wary of strangers and want to stay close to their families and other familiar and trusted caregivers. Until they are old enough to talk clearly about their feelings, it's hard to explain to them that a new caregiver is going to protect them; so, it takes time for children to get used to new people. School-aged children who are sensitive or easily worried, or those who have developmental delays, may need extra time to adjust. It's often easier for young children to make the transition if they have spent some time with their parents and the new person together. Parents also often worry about their child making the transition, and it's easier for parents to keep calm and reassuring if they know their child's teacher and feel comfortable with them. And physical distancing, masks, and a prolonged time away from the school or early child education makes the transition back to school especially challenging this year.

[Ursula Phoenix Weir] I see; so, what can parents do to make the transition easier for their children?

[Karen Remley] Parents can connect with other parents who have children in the same school or early child education programs who can provide information and make them feel comfortable. They can also talk with teachers about the best way to separate from their child—brief goodbyes are often best. By modeling calm and reassuring behavior, parents will help make their child feels safe and protected in a new environment.

[Ursula Phoenix Weir] Now, can you give parents some tips on things they can do if their child has more stress or anxiety this year as they get ready to start a new school year?

[Karen Remley] First, parents can make sure their child has a daily, predictable routine, with regular times for healthy meals, naps, and night sleep at home. Good nightly sleep patterns and knowing what to expect at home helps children cope. They can also talk to a healthcare provider if their child's symptoms of anxiety or behavior problems are severe or persistent. And finally, parents can find resources for themselves if they are sad, worried, or stressed. Taking care of yourself during stressful times can better equip you to take care of others.

[Ursula Phoenix Weir] What can teachers do to help make this transition easier?

[Karen Remley] Teachers can provide virtual connections with parents such as video calls and phone meetings. They can consider connecting parents to other parents to learn about the school or early child education program and exchange insight and tips for success. Teachers can also create virtual tours of their child's school or childcare program or even schedule an in-person meeting outside on the playground. Teachers can also share information with parents of returning children about how daily routines might be different because of the pandemic, and how to help prepare their child for any changes.

[Ursula Phoenix Weir] And what are some other things parents can do to prepare for back to school?

[Karen Remley] It's always good to have a plan for how your child or your child's teacher can reach you in an emergency. Parents can make sure their child's school or early child education program has up-to-date emergency contact information, including their name, phone number, and email and physical addresses. This should also include information about a child's medicines, special health care needs or allergies, and any accommodations they might need. You can also create an emergency card that your child can keep in their school backpack. There are examples of these cards on CDC's website. Just go to cdc.gov and type "backpack emergency card" in the search box.

[Ursula Phoenix Weir] Thank you Dr. Remley. For more information please visit [cdc-dot-gov-slash-children's mental health](http://cdc-dot-gov-slash-children's-mental-health).

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO