

Supporting Families During the School Transition

The start of a new school year comes with great anticipation – both excitement and worry for parents, caregivers, and children as routines and structures are reestablished and the unknown of a new school year is confronted. This is especially true for children, youth and families who have experienced trauma and forced displacement as times of transition can bring stress, anxiety, challenges with mood regulation, and a reduced sense of security and control. This stress can be further exacerbated by current events, violence, and external stressors.

As a provider, you can support families navigating this transitional time by providing guidance and resources for successfully navigating the back-to-school transition. Take time to talk to families about how routine and structure not only support healthy habits but also give children and youth a sense of safety and security:

- **Attend to parent needsⁱ.** The health and wellbeing of children is often one of the greatest concerns and focuses of parents and caregivers, often to the detriment of their own health and wellbeing. As a provider, you can encourage parents and caregivers to acknowledge, monitor and address the impact of routine change on their wellbeing, looking for any challenges related to sleep, appetite, emotion regulation, or mood. Parents and caregivers who are mentally healthy and well are better able to support and be present for their children.
- **Develop a consistent routineⁱⁱ.** Daily routines help provide security and predictability, which can reduce stress and anxiety. Parents and caregivers can help their children with the following in mind:
 - **Sleep schedules:** Establishing and maintaining a consistent sleep schedule is an important part of children's emotional and physical health. Encourage parents and caregivers to help their children maintain stable sleep and wake times, meaning bedtime and rising times that don't change by more than an hour from one day to the next. Sleep schedules can also benefit from consistent and predictable bedtime routines; for example, taking a bath or shower, reading, and powering down electronics.
 - **Electronics:** Remind families that while it is important to create healthy habits and limits around screen time, social media and news intake,

screen time can be a beneficial part of daily routines, especially for connecting with loved ones who don't live nearby.

- Have fun: Encourage families to engage in enjoyable activities and take advantage of available programs, supports, and organized activities such as after school programs, sports, and community activities.
- **Talk about safety.** Safety concerns both inside and outside of school have become an unfortunate reality for children and families in the United States and can raise additional fears for children and families who have experienced violence in their past. Common concerns include community violence, school gun violence, and detention and deportation. As a provider, you can discuss these concerns with your clients and provide resources and guidance to inform safety plans. A few areas of safety support include:
 - Transportation: Encourage parents and caregivers to review basic rules regarding taking the bus, riding a bike or walking to school, especially if any children will be attending a new school or following a new route of transportation. Rules to follow include: waiting for a bus to fully stop before leaving the sidewalk or side of the road, looking both ways before crossing a street, wearing seatbelts, remaining seated while in moving vehicles, wearing bicycle helmets at all times when riding a bike, and riding bikes on the right, in the same direction as vehicle traffic, and in bike lanes if available.
 - In school: Help parents and caregivers to identify the resources available at their children's school(s) for promotion of safety in school. This can include information about staying safe from [bullying](#), what to do when there are school drills, and how to support children navigating fear of [school gun violence](#).
 - Before/after school: Remind parents and caregivers to discuss school dismissal and pick-up options with their children. This can include things such as safe individuals with whom they can stay if their normal afterschool routine is disrupted, family approved options for getting home (walking rather than driving, bus rather than walking, etc.) and creating a [family safety/preparedness plan](#).

While the transition back to school can be stressful for children and families, especially those who have experienced forced displacement, it can also be a time of great excitement and eager anticipation of making new friends, learning new skills,



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and connecting further with community. The more we can help families prepare, the more they can enjoy the experience!

ⁱ <https://youthvillages.org/5-tips-for-parents-well-being-to-start-transition-into-new-school-year/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/back-to-school-tips.aspx>