

EAP Connections

A newsletter for employees
served by Sutter EAP



Tips for Easing Back-to-School Stress

Sutter Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is available 24/7 at 800-477-2258.

Sutter EAP is a **confidential** resource that offers support for life's stressors, including work-related problems, mental health issues, marriage problems, financial worries and more. Call 800-477-2258 to be referred to a licensed mental health therapist who can help.

The start of a new school year is an exciting time for kids and parents—but it can also prove challenging. Mercedes Silver, LMFT, a licensed EAP clinician, offers tips to ease the transition from summer to schoolbooks.

Develop a Routine

Routine and structure are essential for all kids, Silver says, but especially for those feeling stressed about going back to school.

“A new school year presents many unknowns, which can cause anxiety,” she shares. “It’s helpful to explain to kids what the new routine will be—when they’ll be getting up in the morning, where they’ll be going after school—and discuss it at least a week before school starts.”

Encourage Good Sleep

School-age kids need at least nine or 10 hours of sleep each night, Silver says. She suggests setting a firm time in the evening for screens to be turned off and put away.

“A good bedtime routine is so important. Lack of sleep creates tiredness and irritability, and even anxiety. It can influence their health, weight and school performance.”

Help Your Child Find a New Sport or Hobby

It helps for kids to have something to look forward to, such as a favorite sport, a school club or a fun class, Silver says.

“Celebrate back-to-school time as an occasion to explore new interests and try new things—whether it’s soccer, ceramics or debate club.”

Seek Help When You Need It

Contact EAP if you notice your child having a hard time adjusting to school.

“We can refer parents and children to resources for help with behavioral problems or anxiety,” Silver says. “Mental health referrals, daycare resources, education resources. Don’t be afraid to reach out for help.”

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at 800-273-TALK (8255).

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) provides national and local mental health resources and educational tools. Call 800-950-NAMI (6264) or visit nami.org.



Know the Signs: Children and Suicide

According to recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide is the second leading cause of death for U.S. children ages 10-14.

Signs that a child or teenager is in trouble may be subtle, so being attuned to potential red flags is important, says Mercedes Kwiatkowski, M.D., a psychiatrist at Palo Alto Medical Foundation.

Warning Signs

Changes in behavior may offer a warning that a child's mental health is suffering. Dr. Kwiatkowski advises taking special note if your child:

- **Withdraws from activities or sports they once enjoyed.**
- **Sleeps all the time or has new disrupted sleep patterns.**
- **Stops wanting to spend time with friends and family members.**
- **Stops wanting to go to school or struggles with completing schoolwork.**

Dr. Kwiatkowski suggests broaching the subject gently by telling your child you've noticed some changes in their behavior and asking when would be a good time to talk.

"Having an open approach and asking them when they would like to talk about it gives kids some agency," she says. "When your child is talking, validate what they are saying and ask specific questions, such as, 'Are you feeling depressed or very sad lately?'"

Dr. Kwiatkowski suggests finding the right place for a private conversation—perhaps during a walk or car ride.

"Sometimes kids are more open when we're moving; when there's a bit of a distraction," she shares. "Bedtime may also be a good time to talk, when their defenses are down a bit."

If your child struggles speaking with you, suggest they reach out to another caring adult, such as a grandparent or coach, Dr. Kwiatkowski suggests.

"Most importantly," she says, "trust your gut. Do not hesitate to seek help from a mental health professional."

Contact Sutter EAP for a referral to a licensed mental health professional who specializes in working with children: 800-477-2258.