Back to School

Although it’s only mid-July, there is a lot of talk right now about “Back to School”. With the Coronavirus still very much a part of our lives, the reality is that going back to school this fall is going to look and feel very different. And likely right up until the first day of school, there will be a lot of unknowns: who gets to go back, when, how often, in what environment, with what restrictions? These questions will remain unanswered for a while. And when the answers do come, they will be subject to change depending on the course of the virus.

All of this is leaving our kids feeling uncertain and questioning what their future holds. Will they have the comfort and familiarity of the classroom? Will they get to see their friends as often as they like? Where, when and how will they get to eat lunch? These questions are vexing school administrators, parents and kids – and right now there are no answers. But that does not mean that you shouldn’t be talking with your kids about back to school. In fact, now is the best time to begin a discussion about how their feeling.

Below are tips to ensure you are creating a safe space for discussion, and providing continual support for your children during these uncertain times.

- **Start early:** Assume your child will have multi-layered feelings about returning to school and that those feelings are already bubbling up, even though it’s weeks away. They may be excited and relieved. But they also may be hesitant and worried. Bring up the topic and simply ask how they feel. Depending on the age, they may have a hard time putting their feelings into words, so you can offer some possibilities, like “it can be scary to not know what your classroom is going to look like.”

- **Acknowledge the complexity:** Just like adults, kids have been on a roller coaster of emotions related to the pandemic. First, we couldn’t leave the house at all, then we could a little, now we can a bit more - yet, things are not back to “normal.” Acknowledge that these times are confusing, but we’re all following the advice of experts and we feel safe with the guidance they’re giving. Kids will not be able to fully embrace going back to school in the absence of a clear endorsement from their parents.

- **Empathize with the feelings:** Kids may not know how they’re “supposed” to feel right now. And they maybe feeling a large range of emotions from excitement to fear. Our job is to let them know that whatever their feeling is real and valid. You can say something like: “It’s understandable why you might feel a bit scared being with lots of people again.” Or “It’s okay to feel excited to see your friends and feel a little nervous at the same time.”

- **Check in:** As the summer progresses and more information is provided by school districts, check in with your kids about how they’re feeling. They will most likely cycle through a whole host of emotions, and it’s important to give them the opportunity to express those emotions and have them validated.

Children of employees are eligible for EAP services as well! If your child is struggling with back to school, or any other emotional challenge, contact Family Services EAP for FREE and CONFIDENTIAL appointments. Call 978-327-6666, email info@FamilyServicesEAP.org or submit an inquiry online at FamilyServicesEAP.org.