

BACK TO SCHOOL-HOW TO MANAGE YOUR CHILD'S ANXIETY

By Terri Phillips, MFT

Summer is wonderful! The kids are off from school; families are traveling, swimming and having loads of fun. Before you know it, because summer vacation always goes fast, it will be time to buy the new clothes and back packs to send the kids to school to see their friends and meet their new teachers. This time of the year can be very exciting and fun for most children except for the children who suffer from school anxiety issues. Those children see the beginning of the school year as a traumatic event and some begin to panic about it several weeks in advance.

It's hard to know exactly why school anxiety issues occur for some children and not for others. There may be a genetic component or it may just be how your child is "wired". Whatever the cause, it can be an extremely difficult time for children and for their parents. Some red flags that may indicate that your child suffers from school anxiety issues include: stomach aches or headaches prior to school or during school that require you to return to pick them up; panic like symptoms when getting ready to go to school or even at the very discussion of school; difficulty with focus and concentration during school and homework times; and a multitude of other symptoms. School anxiety is a form of anxiety that is specific to school or often called a phobia.

Sometimes children can carry these anxiety symptoms into adulthood making it especially important to identify and manage during childhood. Anxiety and phobias can severely impact a child's level of functioning and enjoyment that they have in life. They become paralyzed by their fears. There are several things that parents can do to help. First of all, it is extremely important to have an open line of communication with your child about their anxiety. Talk about it and identify their feelings for them. Second, validate the emotions they are experiencing and reassure them. Third, set up a schedule so that your child knows what to expect each evening before bed and in the morning when they are to get ready for school. Fourth, have a consistent way to get them to school and try to be as organized as possible. Fifth, make sure they are getting proper nutrition and enough sleep at night as their anxiety is more difficult to cope with if they are tired. Remember that you want to help them work through their fears, not give in to their fears so that they can learn necessary coping skills.

If some of these simple steps don't appear to do enough to alleviate your child's fear related to school, there is professional help available as well. A licensed counselor can evaluate your child and make treatment recommendations. Neurofeedback has also proved to be an effective way for the child to learn to calm their own brain. A trained professional can connect sensors to their scalp with a non-invasive computer system

that helps them condition their brain wave patterns to be in a calm, alert, focused zone. The child will then learn to reach this calm “zone” without the computer. Don’t let school catch you off guard this year. If your child had difficulties last year, start fresh this year and help your child reach their goals to be successful!

Terri Phillips is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist specializing in Neurofeedback located in Temecula. Call 909-730-0410 or visit www.terriphillipsmft.com for more information.