

Be a Friend/Be a Hero

There's a
Hero in You

You are
Brave

You are
a Role
Model

2021 Newsletter

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 **BEACON HEALTH SYSTEM**

Back to School Stress

Can you believe it is back to school time already? While many families are anxiously awaiting going back to school in person, other families are just plain anxious. Let's face it: 2020 was anything but typical. Despite how tremendously irregular our lives became, we did our best to cope and create new routines. The all too familiar "new normal" we so often heard about became our way of life. Now it is time to get back to routines we once thought nothing about. Interactions we so easily engaged in and so often took for granted in the past are now events that might cause anxiety for some. Students going back to in-person learning, quite possibly for the first time in over a year, might feel especially uneasy about the upcoming school year.

Communication Is Key

It is not uncommon for a child to withhold that he or she is feeling sad or anxious for fear of upsetting a parent, but there are signs to look for. A change in your child's eating habits, complaints of an upset stomach, headaches, trouble sleeping, and even bedwetting may be indications that your child is experiencing stress. Perhaps your student is having trouble controlling their emotions and may be angry or get teary more often than usual. These, too, can be signs of overwhelm. Communicating with your child is always important but if you notice any changes in your child's physical or emotional behavior, it is vitally important to speak with him or her about how they are feeling.

Even more essential is to let them do the talking while you listen attentively to what they are saying. Paraphrase and reflect back what is said to clarify understanding. Acknowledge that some feelings are uncomfortable, and we may not like them, but stress that all feelings are okay. Discuss with them the importance of understanding they are in control of how they respond to these uncomfortable feelings. Allow your child to be an active part in discovering positive solutions. This can empower them and give them a sense of control over the uncomfortable feelings they are encountering. The art of active listening is crucial when having a conversation. Model what this looks like so your child can develop this important life skill.

How Can I Help?

There are many things you can do to help your child/children learn to cope with stress. As difficult as it is to see your child experience difficult situations and uncomfortable feelings, it offers a wonderful teachable opportunity for parents and caregivers. When we model positive and healthy ways to confront stressful situations, we teach our children to do the same. Along with modeling coping strategies, there are a number of [stress management skills](#) we can teach our children. These can be lifelong tools that help our children become socially and emotionally equipped to deal with the struggles life might throw their way. Here are a few easy things your child can do to self-regulate and manage the stress they are feeling.

- **Journaling** is a useful talent your child can utilize throughout their entire life. If your child has not yet learned to read and write, encourage them to draw pictures that capture how they are feeling.
- **Laughter** really can be the best medicine. Teach your child to look for the humor in life.
- **Exercise** is good for both the body and the mind. It can be a wonderful way to release stress. Make it a family affair by taking a walk or going for a bike ride (of course, remember your helmets).

Lifelong Skills

We cannot shield our children from every unpleasant situation, nor should we. It is important for our children to learn how to face troublesome circumstances at a young age, with our guidance, so that they will be emotionally equipped to do so throughout their lives.