



Back to School Tips for Parents

Collected by PHILLIPS School Teaching Staff and Family Partners Counselors

As the summer comes to a close thoughts of the school year ahead occupy the minds of parents, families, students and teachers alike. To help ease into the transition of another school year for our families and students, PHILLIPS teaching, related services and Family Partners staff collected a few ‘back-to-school’ tips worth reading:

1. **Anticipate Back to School Needs:** The beginning of the school year is a fresh start and new schools supplies and clothes are common items typically needed or desired. Be sure to involve your student in these decisions to excite them about the school year ahead. When purchasing clothes, be sure that they are in accordance with the school’s dress code policy and that school supplies purchased are on the approved list provided to parents. If you have a limited budget, provide choices to the student that fit your budget.

2. **Manage Time:**
 - a. Wakeup / Bedtime: Ease into the school year timeframe by adjusting bedtime and wakeup time before the start of school by starting 7 – 10 days prior and adjusting by a few minutes each day, so when the first day of school arrives, your student is ready. When establishing a bedtime, create an expectation that all electronics are off and stored for the night.

 - b. Homework Time: Create a structured time for homework that best suits the student and family. Set up a place for storing school work, lunches, papers that need to be returned to reduce last minute panic. Using a timer can help define periods of time for some children (be sure a timer does not trigger anxiety in your child before using). It can be used for defining a reading time, or taking a tech break. Tech breaks are a pre-determined amount of time where the use of technology, such as a cell phone, is allowed. You are giving the child permission to use their cell phone, for example, decreasing distractions during non tech time.

3. **Keep Communication Open:**
 - a. Critical Information: Check-in with classroom staff and communicate any needs or concerns and share critical information with teaching staff and administration such as emergency contacts, medication requirements and other vital information. Regarding medication, please note that meds need to be delivered by an adult. Finally, the best method for communication with teachers varies, so be sure to clarify the best way to communicate so you are assured your communication is received.

 - b. Special Needs: Know what services your child may be eligible for by going to the counseling/guidance office for assistance or reaching out to your local Parent Education Advocacy Training Center (PEATC).

- 4. Prepare Your Student:** Talk to your student about going to school and what they are looking forward to or fear.

Managing Anxiety:

- a. If your child has social anxiety, and worries about other students, pair them with a child known and comfortable to them.
 - b. Plan to visit the school/classroom before the first day to ease anxiety and meet the teacher/staff. This may need to be done slowly, in what is called successive approximation, or chunking. Here are next steps:
 - i. Drive by the school on another day. Follow that by stopping and going into the lobby. Pre arrange for a teacher or counselor to greet you. If your child is not ready come back a second time to visit the classroom.
 - ii. After the visit, do something special to associate pleasant experiences with visiting school, such as going for ice cream.
 - iii. Do not take away an existing positive experience, such as participating in sports, or school will be associated with a negative experience.
 - c. Create a social story to guide your child through the steps of going to school, which may include taking pictures of activities to do while getting ready for school, (parents may need help from a professional in creating this) www.child-autism-parent-cafe.com/how-to-write-a-social-story.html.
 - d. Don't overdue 'what if' scenarios, which can increase anxiety. Keep it simple.
- 5. Finally: Enjoy the return to school and all the excitement it brings!**