



Dr Thomas Nielsen says listening, talking, planning and making time for love and laughter will help ease a child's feelings of anxiety or stress about returning to school.

Beating back to school blues

For parents with children heading back to school, or making the leap from primary to secondary school, it can quickly become a stressful time for all involved.

However, there are ways for both children and parents to come to terms with a reluctance or anxiety to return to school and study, and Associate Professor Dr Thomas Nielsen from the

University of Canberra says it all starts with talking.

“Start with providing your child with a secure base of feeling confident and comfortable with talking about how they’re feeling as this will help generally maintain health and happiness. If you remind children that it’s okay and normal to feel a bit worried or stressed about returning to school, this will help to ease feelings of anxiety. Even adults go through these feelings when returning to work,” Dr Nielsen says.

Helping children to relax through coping mechanisms such as taking deep breaths, playing outdoors, a good diet, a healthy sleep routine and imagining the good parts of returning to school such as spending time with friends and learning interesting new topics is the key to maintaining a healthy attitude.

“If there are specific issues causing the child anxiety or stress,

you need to address it, even by going in and speaking with their teacher,” he says. “Some parents fall into the trap of being too stressed themselves and running out of time, but you need to prepare and be organised. You can begin reading with your child, create a wall calendar or sticker system to give the child responsibility too, ensure they have all of their books and stationery and have a negotiated emergency plan in case you’re not able to pick them up after school or if they miss a bus.

“Different ages present different challenges but if parents present a positive attitude and really listen – often you don’t need to comment or provide advice just listening is the key – it will help build a child’s positive attitude and ease the transition between holiday and school mode.”

- Madeline Power

Photo Gary Schafer

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