



Keeping your Back to School Cool

As the summer ends, we can't help but notice the flurry of activity that surrounds the 'Back to School' period. For many, routines change and priorities shift, often bringing with them their own unique pressures and anxieties. We have compiled a few tips to help address some of those challenges and reduce the impact of stress during this time and beyond.

Preparation

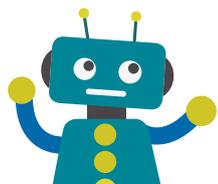
An obvious starting point, but being prepared can really help to reduce the impact of potentially stressful situations. Preparing lunches and getting books and clothes ready the night before, for example, can help to ease the pressure of getting everyone out in good time in the morning. Involving the kids in preparation can also help to teach organisational skills and a sense of independence. Knowing that things are ready the night before can also be a reassuring thought before bedtime.

Routines

Establishing a routine can be an effective way of managing anxiety. The summer months are often more flexible with regards to routines, with no morning rush and later bedtimes. New routines can be challenging to establish, involving new rules and new behaviours. Managing expectations can help everyone get used to new routines. Working on the new routine a few days beforehand can be helpful. For example, establish a new time for going to bed or getting up in the morning, and count down to that time. This can help to ease the transition and organisation of their time. It works too for adults by managing anxiety around being late. If new routines involve a number of different changes, then consider taking one part at a time to change. Once the first part is embedded into routine then move on to the next necessary change. You will need to give yourself time to do this.

Fitting In

The need to 'fit in' can often be a stressful part of growing older. In particular, children (and adults) can worry about their body image – something commonly linked to self-esteem. Children in particular may struggle to feel at ease with themselves and their appearance when comparing to their peers and the images they see on social media. Building a positive image of yourself both inside and out can be good for your mental health. It's useful to consider that what people share about themselves isn't always the full picture. Remember, what you see on social media is edited and filtered – try not compare yourself to others, in real life and online, to be mindful of the messages you see and hear in the media and how they can perpetuate unhelpful stereotypes.





Considering the cost

Similar to Christmas, the 'Back to School' period can sometimes be a time when we overstretch financially – new uniforms, sports equipment, stationery etc. – it can all start to add up and bring undue financial pressure. Added to this are expectations influenced by peer pressure and messages coming from social media extolling the virtues of the latest 'must-haves'. Working out a realistic budget and sticking to it can be a real help. Planning purchases in advance can also help to reduce the likelihood of last minute impulse purchases. Managing expectations may also help to avoid disappointment and difficult conversations.

Being Present

With so many competing demands it can sometimes be difficult to be 'in the moment'. It's not always easy to do, but even small changes can make a difference. Come in relaxed – if you need to, take 10 minutes to shower and change before sitting down with the children – they can pick up on moods and if you seem relaxed, they'll be relaxed too. Eat together – get into the habit of sitting down and enjoying a meal or light snack together – telling them about your day may encourage them to tell you about theirs. Enjoy the bedtime routine – having your quiet company while they play in the bath or a short story can be enough. For more, visit: familylives.org.uk

Pause

It may take a little planning, but looking after yourself is something you shouldn't overlook or feel guilty about. Consider the analogy of the airplane safety briefing. There's a reason we're advised to place the oxygen mask on ourselves first – that's because looking after ourselves first ensures that we're best placed to look after others. Make time to relax – that may involve doing things like listening to music, or simple treats like a long soak in the bath, watching a movie or going for a walk.

Accept Support

Getting help if you need it is a positive step and not a sign of weakness. If you're feeling stressed or anxious, talking to a friend, or family member can help to provide a fresh outlook. Online forums can help you share in the experiences of others, while websites such as www.FamilyCarers.ie, www.parentline.ie, parentingni.org or familysupportni.gov.uk can provide useful general information on parenting.

For further advice, you may wish to speak your GP or appropriate medical professional.

The Minding Your Head (mindingyourhead.info) and Public Health Agency (publichealth.hscni.net) websites have lots of general information on mental health and services available across Northern Ireland and the yourmentalhealth.ie and healthpromotion.ie websites have similar information for those in ROI.

