



Anxiety About the Return to
School: It's Not Just About the Kids

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Our Work

Research



We are at the forefront of neuroscience efforts to find objective biological measures of mental illness that will lead to [earlier diagnosis, more individualized treatment methods, and new and better interventions.](#)

Clinical Care



We provide world-class clinical care to children struggling with mental health and learning disorders. We have helped thousands of children get the help they need in our offices and in their communities.

Public Education



We equip millions of parents, educators and policymakers with the information they need to end the stigma and misinformation that cause so many children to miss out on life-changing treatment.

Who Am I?

- Mother (of a 10 year old)
- Working from Home
- Clinical Psychologist (Anxiety Disorders Center)



You
are doing
Better
»»»»»»»»»»»»»»»»
than you
think you are.

...Even if it doesn't feel like it

You are:

- Taking care of your family
- Supporting transition to school (remote/hybrid/in person)
- Managing your own emotions
- Helping your kids manage theirs
- Working from home
- Dealing with changes
- Managing uncertainty

The Return to School

What Are the Kids Thinking About?

- Range of emotions (excited, happy, worried, stressed)
- Friends
- New type of learning (eg remote, hybrid, in person)
- Academics
- Extra curriculars
- Concerns about COVID
- NO concerns about COVID
- Comparison to siblings & others with different plan



And the caregivers- what are you thinking about?

Range of emotions

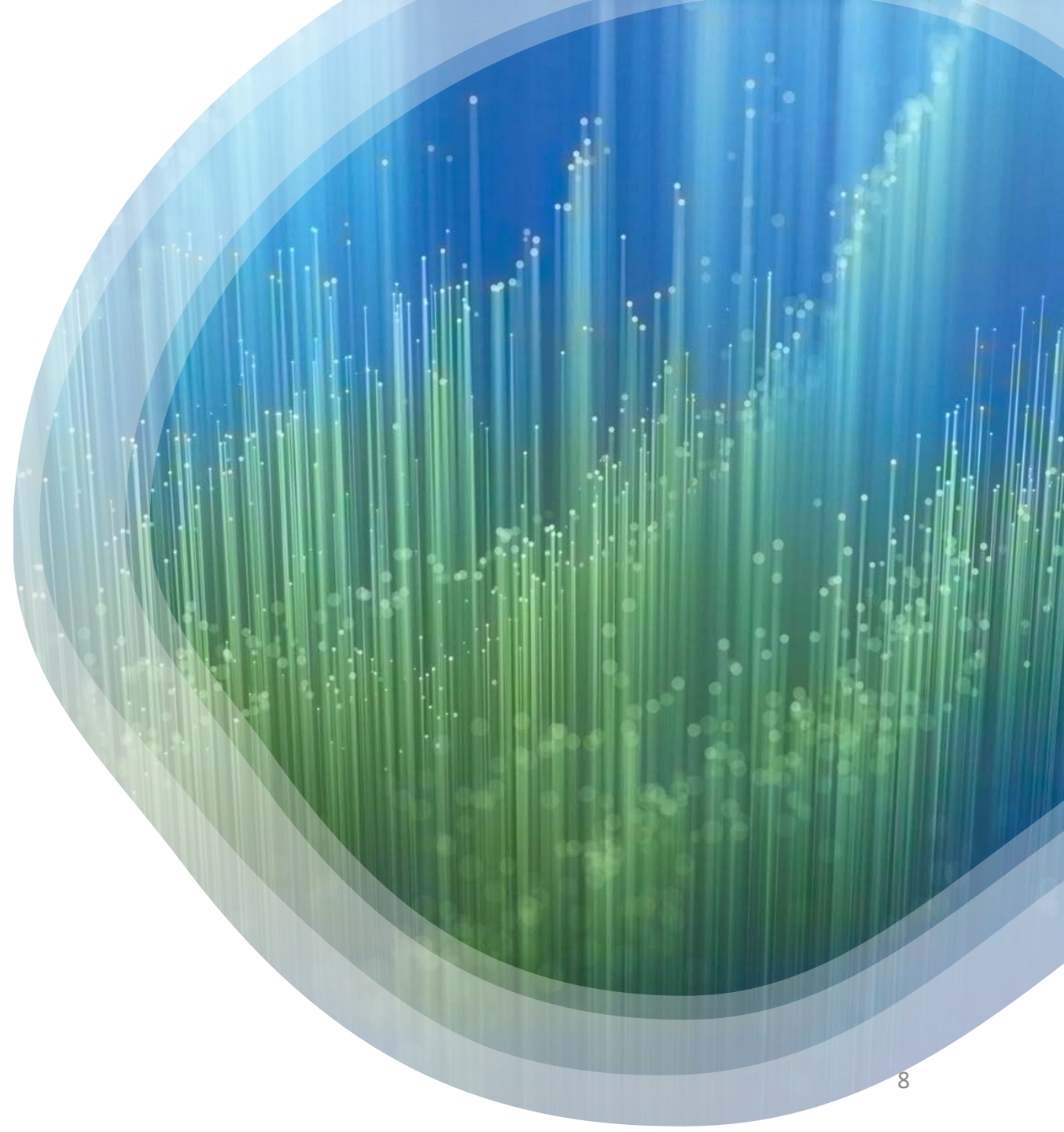
Stress related to balance of WFH & school

Concerns about type of learning

Academics

Concern about the kids' concerns

And more....



Kids Experience Stress Even Under Typical Circumstances

School

- Homework
- Managing schedules
- Organization
- Teachers

Social

- Negotiating friendships
- Managing social activities

Family

- Limits
- Expectations
- Conflict
- Multiple relationships

Balance

- How to make it all work
- Time management

+ COVID-19

- Disrupted schedule and routines
- Normal activities canceled
- Separation from peers
- Lots of time with family
- Worry about illness
- Uncertainty

Mental Health Impacts of Stress

Younger Children

- Seeking Reassurance
- Clingy
- Tantrums
- Disruption in sleep
- Physical symptoms of anxiety
- Regression

Teens

- Lack of motivation
- Anxiety/Worry
- Depression/Isolation
- Disappointment
- Mourning loss of connection

Young Adults

- Worry/Anxiety
- Depression
- Increased dependence
- Disappointment
- Missing connection

Pre- COVID-19 Mental Health and Learning Disorders

- ADHD/Learning Disorders
- Anxiety/Depression
- Behavioral Disorders
- Autism/Developmental Disorders

*Watch for persisting signs or changes

IT'S NOT ALL

**Doom
And
Gloom**

Keep in Mind....

- Stress does not necessarily = trauma
- There are a *lot* of protective factors that we want to pay attention to
- **SOCIAL SUPPORT** is **KEY** (for caregivers as much as kids)

Kids Are Resilient AND



resilience

noun

re·sil·ience | \ ri-'zil-yən(t)s \

Definition of **RESILIENCE**

1 : an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change



Be like the bamboo, bend but do not break

They Follow Your Lead



How Adults Respond Can Help Kids Cope

- Lead with validation
- Give age appropriate information
- Routines and expectations maintained or re-established
- Model non-anxious coping (remain or **appear** calm)
- Self Care

Validation

- Let's the child/teen know you take it seriously
- Conveys "I get it"
- Comes before problem solving
- Works for partners and adults too
- "This schedule *does* seem confusing."
- "I know you are disappointed that you are not in the same class as "John"
- "You were really looking forward to ..."
- "That *does* suck"

You're
overreacting



Yeowch! That
looks like it hurts!

You'll do fine



*It can be scary
trying new things*

JUST TRY TO FIND
SOMEONE ELSE TO
PLAY WITH



IT'S LONELY WHEN
YOU CAN'T FIND YOUR
FRIENDS AT RECESS

You're better off



It's disappointing when
things don't go your
way

Age Appropriate Information

- Kids know far more than we think
- State what you know and what we don't
- Avoid inserting your own worries/concerns
- “What questions do you have about going back to school?”
- Consider child friendly info about COVID (cartoons, graphics, social story)
- Ask teens what they *already* know

Giving Info About School

- Understand what you can ahead of time
- Share the basics
- Clarify areas in which your child has questions
- “That’s a good question. I don’t know the answer to that. Let’s write it down and I’ll find out.”

<https://www.newsbreak.com/news/2054429647088/njs-funniest-mother-explains-your-schools-plan-video> for a 😊

Routines

- All kids need routines and expectations (even when they protest)
- Younger kids do well with visual schedules and simple tasks
(ex- DO _____ = reward)
- Teens respond better to a dialogue vs edict

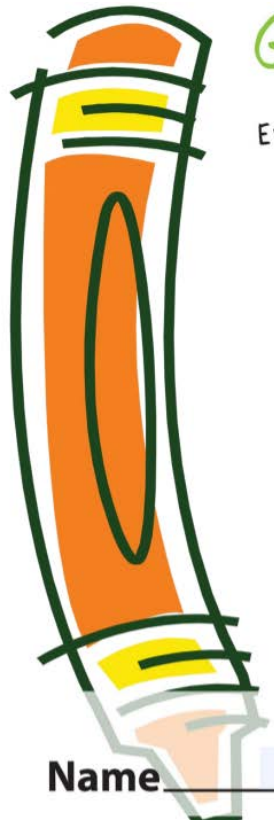
“You’re staying up WAY too late. You have to get sleep before school starts”

VS

“I noticed that you have been staying up very. What are your thoughts about getting on track for the start of school?”

Re-Establishing Routines

- What are the top 3 priorities?
- Be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time limited)
- Use rewards
- Be kind to yourself (and the kids) – this takes time!



Good Morning _____

Every morning I need to...



brush my teeth



wash my face & hands



get dressed



eat my breakfast



pack my backpack



Name _____

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Kidpointz.com

DESCRIPTION	POINTS	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	TOTAL	
WEEK OF	<input type="text"/>								TOTAL	<input type="text"/>
NAME _____		 Pointing Kids in the Right Direction www.KidPointz.com								

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BEHAVIOR CONTRACT

Date: _____

I promise to work on these behavior expectations: _____

Choose 3 of the following or create your own.

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I will go to bed when asked | <input type="checkbox"/> I will pick up after myself | <input type="checkbox"/> I will use good manners |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I will not interrupt | <input type="checkbox"/> I will keep good hygiene | <input type="checkbox"/> I will treat others with respect |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I will respect the property and privacy of others | <input type="checkbox"/> I will be sensitive to the feelings of others | <input type="checkbox"/> I will avoid behaviors that are aggressive, destructive or dangerous |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I will not give in to peer pressure | <input type="checkbox"/> I will avoid places and objects that are unsafe or dangerous | <input type="checkbox"/> I will take responsibility for my actions and not blame others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I will present a positive attitude instead of being negative, pessimistic or rude | <input type="checkbox"/> I will complete my homework on time | <input type="checkbox"/> I will eat healthy foods |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I will get ready for school on time | <input type="checkbox"/> I will listen and be attentive when spoken to | <input type="checkbox"/> I will do my chores |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I will limit my use of technology (television, cell phone, computer, video games, etc) to ___ hrs/day | <input type="checkbox"/> I will spend time with my family | <input type="checkbox"/> I will _____ |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> I will _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I will _____ |

Reward for meeting these expectations: _____

Consequence for not meeting these expectations: _____



Child Signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent Signature: _____ Date: _____

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Model Non-Anxious Coping

- Easier said than done
- Be mindful of your own emotions
- Wait if needed
- Enlist partner/spouse if needed

“When *little people* are overwhelmed by *big emotions*, it’s our job to share our calm, not join their chaos.”

-L.R. KNOST

The Gottman Institute

Examples of Non-Anxious Coping

- Getting a memo about a change in return to school plan
 - “I have some bad news...”
 - “I want to share some info about school....”
- Model brave risk taking

- Navigating assignments on school portal
- Sleep related concerns
- Separations



reminder:
 **take care
of yourself!**

Self Care: It's Not Just an Afterthought!

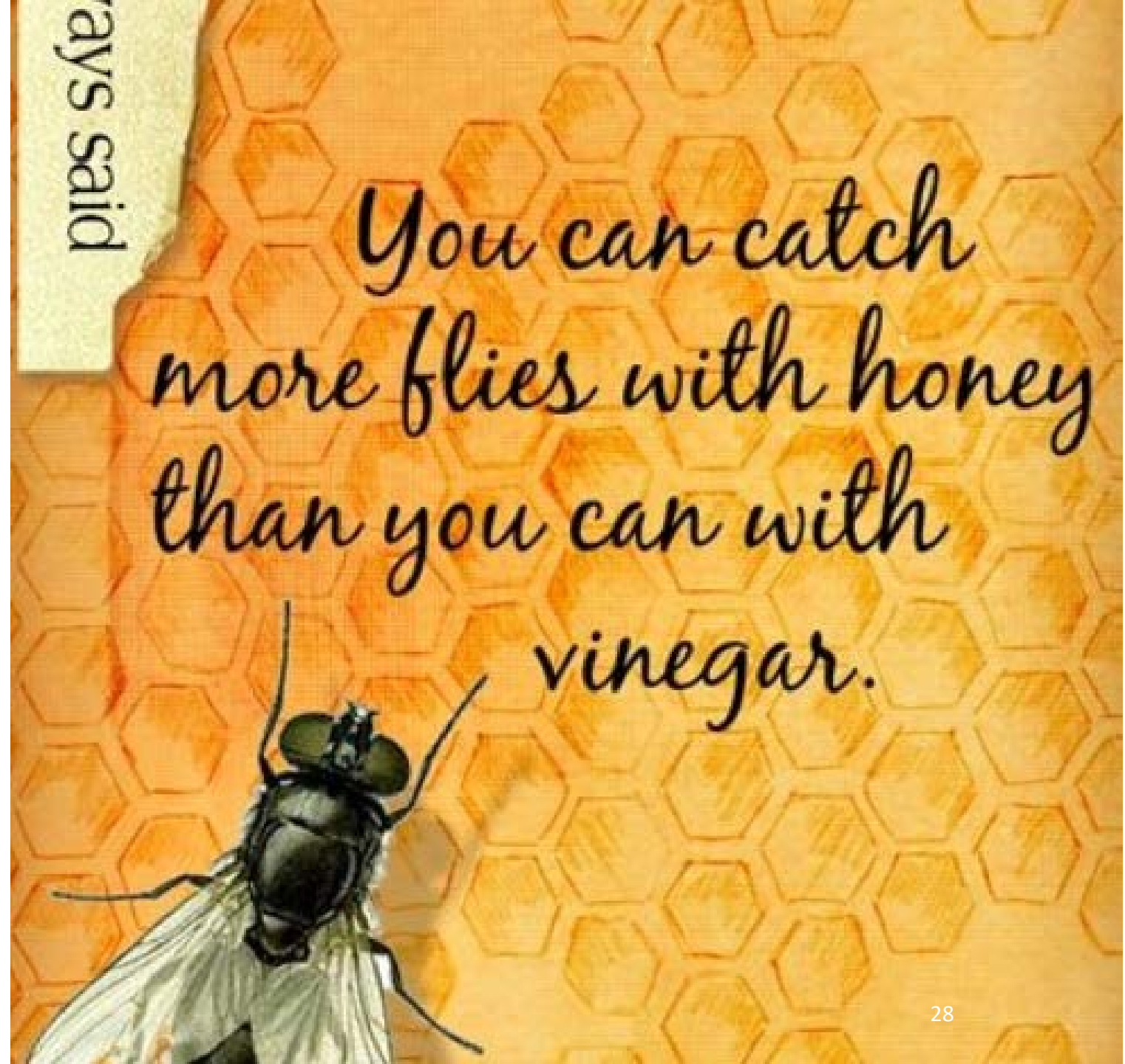
- Airplane analogy: Put on your own oxygen mask first
- Schedule self care (not a spa day)
- Assess barriers to self care and plan around them
- Redefine the village (social support is a protective factor)
- Know when you need help for yourself

Engaging with School

Things to Consider

- Does my child have a 504 or IEP → if yes, suggest connecting with school as it's starting
- Does my child have learning- based needs?
- Do I have specific concerns re- worries related to the return to school?
- What is time sensitive?
- What's my goal?

- Lead with compassion
- Teachers/administrators likely have concerns about return to school
- Put it in writing
- State what your concern is
- State what you would like to see
- Suggest times to speak



What If My Child Needs
More Support?

Pay Attention

- *Persistent or enduring* changes in sleep, appetite, interest, mood and behavior
- If your child/teens tells you that they are struggling (they might not)
- Feedback from school, coaches or others who know your child
- RED FLAGS
- It's much better to intervene early

Where To Get Help

- Consider telehealth if in person isn't available
- Talk to pediatrician or primary care
- Evidence-based treatment
- Sometimes treatment or support for the parent can be VERY helpful

Resources

- [Childmind.org/coronavirus](https://www.childmind.org/coronavirus)
- [Childmind.org/telehealth](https://www.childmind.org/telehealth)
- Common Sense Media
- American Academy of Pediatrics
- Depression and Anxiety Association of America



THANK YOU
for listening
-
ANY
QUESTIONS?



CHILD MIND[®]
INSTITUTE