

MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New school year brings anxiety for many students

The beginning of a new school year is full of mixed emotions for students, from excitement through to fear and overwhelming anxiety. Students experience more challenging work, new teachers and often, new classmates. They may also be grieving the loss of old friends and teachers.

“During this time, it is normal for them to be a bit frightened or anxious, becoming clingy, teary or angry. Some may say they don’t want to go to school or that they are feeling sick,” says Amanda Gordon, President of the Australian Psychological Society. “All these things are typical of students feeling overwhelmed by the changes and expectations they are facing.”

There are a number of key things parents and teachers can do to support children and students during this time. These include:

- **Routines:** Establish consistent routines both at home and at school. Writing (or drawing) lists of what to do each day helps students to know what is going to happen and what is expected and helps students to feel safe.
- **Sleep:** Make sure your children/adolescents are getting enough sleep (things always seem worse when you are tired).
- **Problem solving:** Make opportunities to talk with your children. Sometimes children aren’t that great at problem solving and can let little things blow up out of proportion. If your child tells you of a problem they are having, ask the child to tell you 3 things they think they may be able to do about it. This gives you the opportunity to understand how the child is viewing the problem and also provides a way for you to offer suggestions as to how the problem might be solved.

When to worry?

Just wait:

For the majority of students these more emotional behaviours are a normal and within 4-6 weeks or by the end of term 1, most students adjust and feel comfortable with these changes.

Time to act:

For a small number of students, this more emotional behaviour (crying easily, extreme or continual anger outbursts, excessive worrying etc) is present most of the time, and the beginning of a school year just makes these behaviours worse. For these students, the adults in their lives (parents and teachers) need to take some further action such as:

- Talk together, share observations of the student and discuss concerns.
- Develop a clear picture of how often and in what circumstances the concerning behaviour is occurring.
- Talk with the student welfare coordinator and/or school psychologist.

- Contact your GP. (There is now the option of getting a referral to a psychologist for up to 12 sessions that will be paid for by Medicare, for students with mental health concerns).

“There are many effective ways that children and adolescents can learn to manage their anxiety and the earlier they get this help, the better off they will be,” says Gordon.

The APS is currently a partner in the Federal Government’s KidsMatter national mental health initiative (along with Beyondblue: the national depression initiative; APAPDC – The Australian Principals Association Professional Development Council and supported by the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund). Fifty primary schools nationally are currently participating in this pilot project aimed to support schools to better manage the mental health of their students.

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