

Pointers For Parents

Help Your Child Cope With School Stress

(NAPSA)—Each new school year can be a stressful time for children, with new teachers and classmates, new rooms, new routines and more schoolwork. It can be particularly unnerving and overwhelming for children facing major transitions such as starting elementary school or middle school. As a parent, there are proactive steps you can take to support your child.

- Express interest and enthusiasm about the start of the school year. If you are confident and excited, your child will be, too.

- Take a walk around the school with your child and locate his or her classrooms, lunchroom, playground and restrooms. This will help your child to feel more comfortable with his or her surroundings and prevent feeling lost on the first day.

- Take time to listen and discuss aspects of the new school year that he or she is worried about. Remember to let your child know that it's normal to feel nervous about the start of school. For parents of younger children, suggest that your child take a family photo or special object to school to make his or her surroundings more comfortable.

- Spend time each day talking to your child about what happened in school. Give your child positive feedback about his or her new experiences.

- Praise and encourage your child to become involved with school activities and try new opportunities.

- Attend school functions and stay involved in your child's edu-



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cation. Children whose parents are more involved with their education have higher achievement, are better adjusted and are less likely to drop out of school.

- Make a point to learn not just about how your child develops physically, but socially and emotionally, as well. If you are aware of what's typical behavior and thoughts for your child's stage in life, you will be able to tell more readily when things may not be right.

Anxiety and stress about school are normal for a child and usually pass within the first few days or weeks. If your child continues to seem anxious or stressed, it may be time to seek help. Talk to your pediatrician about what you can do as a parent. If problems persist, consider a referral to a trained and qualified mental health professional.

For more information on helping your child cope with stress as well as supporting his or her social and emotional development, contact a nearby Mental Health Association or the National Mental Health Association at www.nmha.org or (800) 969-NMHA (6642).