



## New school year, new anxieties - Chicago Tribune, August 26, 2007 (Q Section)

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Meeting new classmates, teachers, getting good grades, competitive sports, socializing and just being away from parents, are all part of the back-to-school ritual. Although many kids are excited about the new year, school triggers high levels of anxiety for others. If the anxiety and fear interfere with your child's ability to maintain a normal routine or cause sleep problems, excessive worry and physical symptoms such as stomachaches, consider these tips from Mark Pfeffer, a licensed psychotherapist and director of the Panic Anxiety Recovery Center of Chicago and sponsor of [beyondanxiety.com](http://beyondanxiety.com).

- Talk to your child, regardless of age. Don't dismiss his fears. Try to find out what he is anxious about. Drawing pictures sometimes helps younger kids express emotions. Let them know it is OK to be afraid, and remind them of the scary times they have overcome in the past. Communicate issues early with school staff.
- Be positive and relaxed. Try not to show your anxiety about their anxiety. Answer any questions they ask in a calm, matter-of-fact manner. Focus on the things they are excited about at school, write them on a list and read it to them every day or have them read to you. Suggest having fun with the fear, like a roller-coaster ride and other familiar examples.
- Plan your work and work your plan. Instead of avoiding, help them learn to confront challenging moments. Role-play potentially difficult situations, practice ways to think and respond even though the child may be uncomfortable or embarrassed. Even a young child may respond to other "adult" behavioral techniques such as guided imagery and relaxation training.
- Let them know how proud you are each day they face a fear. Regroup at the end of each day for "talk time" to discuss the ups and downs. As you listen to their take on the day, be attentive and creative. Adjust the plan, as needed.
- With most children, anxiety and phobias can be handled at home and or school, but some may require additional help. Ultimately, parents know their children best. If you see your child struggling for more days than not, over several weeks, seek out a professional consultation.