Building Back-to-School Confidence as a Family

Families can use these age-appropriate strategies to ease fears, encourage resilience, and set children up for success this school year.

Back-to-school season often brings a mix of excitement and nervousness. Worries about new routines, teachers, classmates, or academic expectations are common. Families can help ease these concerns by providing reassurance, structure, and opportunities for open communication.

Strategies for All Ages

Children feel more confident when they know what to expect.

- Prepare school supplies and clothing in advance.
- Review daily schedules together.
- Visit the school or playground before the first day, if possible.
- Maintain consistent bedtimes and morning routines.
- Focus on encouragement, not perfection.

Pre-K-3rd Grade

For young children, the key is helping them feel safe and secure. Celebrate small successes, such as entering the classroom independently or learning a new routine. Positive reinforcement helps build confidence and resilience. Families can:

- Create a simple, consistent goodbye routine;
- Keep farewells brief and positive;
- Read books about starting school;
- Practice classroom routines; and
- Encourage children to express feelings through conversation, drawing, or play.

Upper Elementary

Elementary-aged children might worry about friendships, fitting in, or meeting academic expectations. Some become anxious about making mistakes or keeping up with classmates.



Families can help by:

- Praising effort and progress rather than focusing only on grades;
- Setting realistic goals for schoolwork and behavior;
- Encouraging children to ask for help when needed; and
- Creating time each day to talk about school experiences.

Ask questions like “What was the best part of your day?” or “What challenged you today?” that can reveal concerns early.

Middle-Level

Middle school introduces greater independence, more complex social situations, and increased academic demands.

Helpful approaches include:

- Encouraging open, judgment-free conversations;
- Teaching organization and time-management skills;
- Using planners, calendars, or reminder apps;
- Promoting healthy habits such as exercise, adequate sleep, and hobbies; and
- Reminding students that mistakes are part of learning and growth.

naesp National Association of Elementary School Principals