BRAIN-BASED BACK TO SCHOOL TIPS FOR FAMILIES

STRATEGIES FOR CREATING A PREDICTABLE AND STRESS-FREE TRANSITION BACK TO SCHOOL WITH AN EMPHASIS ON PREDICTABILITY, PREPARATION, AND CONNECTION



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KEY CONCEPT:

The key is using what we know about reducing anxiety, avoidance, and stress by using our brain-based lens to navigate prediction and control in a visual cognitive way.



STRATEGIES:

Familiarization with School Environment

- Visit the classroom or learning space to ensure familiarity. The key here is that the child can touch, see, and experience the demands of the environment in a low-key and low-stress way before the first day with all the excitement and increased social, sensory, and transition demands! If your child struggles with this, I encourage you to ask if you can come even before the crowded "back to school open house" and visit when there are no kids or many people around in prep for the "back to school open house."
- Meet with the teacher or homeschool leader to observe interactions.
- Create a brain-based resume for your child and kindly and positively share it with the teachers, aides, and support team in your child's classroom or school.

Transportation Practice

- Drive multiple routes to school or homeschool group, making the experience fun and engaging. The idea is to experience the travel in a few different ways, if necessary, to help them navigate this experience when they are in a possibly heightened stress state in the morning before school.
- Role-play different transportation methods to reduce surprises, including carpooling or bus rides.

Virtual Learning Setup / Homeschool Setup

- Create and set up a dedicated learning space at home well in advance. Give your child some control over what they have in this setting, what they will do as "brain breaks," and where it could be set up in the home. It is best to dedicate a spot in the house that can be left set up and be the designated space for learning. If that is not possible, create a predictable environment that is set up in prep for the day's learning demands! This can be a preparation ritual to transition into and out of the homeschool or virtual school during the day.
- Involve your child in organizing their learning space to give them a sense of control.



Early Shopping for Supplies

- Shop for school supplies and clothes early to reduce last-minute stress and increase predictability.
- Try to set aside time to create some fun, connection, and control around prepping the supplies for school. The more you can create control and connection during this, the less avoidance in the future with using the supplies!

Lunch & Nutrition

- For school lunches, try to get a copy of the menu well before summer ends so you can preview the options together. Discuss packed lunch food choices as well.
- Practice the last two weeks of summer, a few days a week or more, and start a more set snack and lunchtime schedule similar to the routine around food at school during the day. This can be a very helpful transition!
- Ensure proper nutrition, especially during the first week, avoiding sugary and inflammatory foods.

Daily Routine Familiarization

- Discuss and take pictures of recess areas and additional classes they will be frequenting to help your child visualize and reduce anxiety about transitions. This will help them navigate all the unique or different environments they may experience during the day. It is extremely helpful to take pictures/videos of your child with them in these spaces to help them visualize themselves physically there. Then, as you prepare to return to school, you can reference these spaces and show them pictures/videos of them in their school environment. This will help them more efficiently process with greater prediction and integration by providing visual imagery! This may seem excessive, but many parents are surprised at how helpful this tip is!
- Use pictures to plan the daily schedule, allowing your child to see and choose the order of activities if you have control over this, like in a homeschool setting.



Clothing Preparation

- Lay out clothes for the entire first week or at least each night before bed. The struggle of picking clothes and the morning demands can be extremely hard on parents **and** their kids! Making a slight shift by laying out the clothes, backpack, and even lunch prep as part of the bedtime routine the night before can seem excessive, but it makes a HUGE difference in the morning transitions!

Movement, Breaks, and How To Spot Deflections

- Integrate regular movement breaks to prevent deflective behavior, especially for kids who might have challenges in the classroom. Learn what the signs of overflow are for your child and include that on your brain-based resume for the teachers and yourself if you are homeschooling. The idea is to understand the slight signs of deflections and overwhelm before they become big behaviors and stress responses. We can achieve this by creating brain breaks beforehand, if possible. **Signs of deflections or overflow: they may start to create more auditory output, i.e., humming, talking to themselves, or singing. They may become wiggly, pick at, or bite their nails. They may stop making eye contact, or their cheeks are getting flushed. This can be a sign of a fight-or-flight response.** The key is that we want to know the signs of stress before the "big behaviors or challenges" start and have a specific brain break plan to meet each child's needs.
- Depending on the child's neuro-deflective profile, ensure the home learning space accommodates flexible seating and standing options or noise reduction possibilities!

Stress Reduction in Transitions

- Use visual aids like pictures or drawings to plan and predict daily activities. It is common to think that talking through the transitions is sufficient because a child is verbal. In reality, it can be beneficial to help by giving them visual imagery in the form of a visual schedule that they can see and reference throughout the day at each transition.
- Create a predictable after-school plan involving activities like outdoor play, music, or drawing for 15-30 minutes. We call this creating prediction pegs!

WATCH AND WONDER CONSIDERATIONS

Observe your child's behavior for signs of stress and long-term deflective behaviors.

Do you see patterns of specific times of the day or week that they seem to struggle more? Are there particular environments that you can see are more difficult? Are there specific social, academic, or extracurricular environments that seem to be especially difficult?

Watch for patterns to develop your "right now strategies" to support them best.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

- Emphasize connection before correction to build a supportive environment.
- Discuss the day's schedule and transitions to provide predictability.
- Now is the time for more nervous system support with clinical tools and "right-now strategies" provided by a brain-based chiropractor. Meeting any new stress demand is about nervous system control and regulation. It's important to get checked to ensure efficient adaptation to stress and change!
- The key is to fill the prediction, control, and connection buckets during transitions to help lower stress and anxiety and, therefore, reduce avoidance and challenging behaviors.

PASSPORT GAME

We love turning everyday activities into games! See the next page for a fun "Passport Game," in which children can earn stamps or stickers for completing each activity.



The Passport Game is more than just a game. It's a fun and engaging way for children to feel more prepared and involved for the upcoming school year. It adds an element of fun to learning, making it more enjoyable for children.

BACK TO SCHOOL PASSPORT GAME

Visit the Classroom

- [ ] How many windows does the classroom have?
- [ ] Find 5 pencils
- [ ] What color is the eraser?

Meet the Teacher

- [ ] Ask them their favorite color, tv show, or food

Transportation Practice

- [ ] Try 2 different routes to school, or two different times of day

Set Up a Learning Space

- [ ] Organize your learning space
- [ ] Prepare your favorite supplies

Shop For Supplies

- [ ] Shop early for your school supplies

Lunch & Nutrition Practice

- [ ] Take a picture of the lunch area
- [ ] Practice having the same snack and lunch time at home as you will have at school

Clothing Preparation

- [ ] Lay out your clothes the week or night before school starts

Movement Breaks

- [ ] Decide which movement breaks you enjoy the most and practice them

Visual Aids for Transitions

- [ ] Take a picture of your recess, classes, and daily activities

After-School Plan

- [ ] Create and follow a predictable after-school routine

Discuss with your care-giver what prize you will receive for completing all tasks!