

Address Concerns Proactively

It feels good to cross back-to-school items off the to-do list, but for some worries it will be a waiting game to see if concerns are warranted. The key is to be aware, connected, and proactively setting the stage for positive experiences.

Learning concerns

Plan to connect with teachers on a regular basis.

Having a collaborative relationship helps both of you understand how to help your child succeed. Listening with an open mind will be as important as sharing insights on your child's personality and learning style. Tell them about any past issues with learning, behavior, or friends. Conferences are important, but most teachers also welcome emails, texts, or calls specific to a concern.

Get up to speed on resources. Learn what the school offers in the way of support or tutoring. Understand how the gifted program works. Learn about formal and informal accommodations if your child learns differently. Research community, library, and online homework help. Start the year knowing there's help if your child needs it.

Avoid surprises. Most schools offer some type of parent portal where you can see your child's grades, missing assignments, attendance record and more. Mobile apps may also give real-time reporting on test scores and grades. Learn what is available to you and build a routine of reviewing it with your child.

Have realistic expectations. Not every child is an Einstein, but every child has strengths and their own unique talents. Talk with your child to set high, but realistic goals for this year. Remember to offer opportunities to excel in areas outside of school as well.

Show your child that learning matters. Plan time in your day to talk about school without multi-tasking. Read together, explore new ideas, do problem-solving, celebrate school successes and really listen to their worries. Keep your radar on for issues that need your help.

Social concerns

You can't make friendships happen or eliminate negative social actions, but you can prepare your child to better manage these things on their own.

Help your child gain self-confidence. Not just with praise, rather by having opportunities to learn new skills, succeed at things they attempt, and by having adults in their life who are genuinely interested in them. Realistic self-confidence is one way to give a child the strength they need to withstand negative social pressure and build positive connections.

Support friendship building. Talk to your child about what it means to be a good friend. Set up get-togethers in the early days of school. Encourage connections with classmates who share similar interests by getting your child involved in clubs or activities.

Teach them to be assertive and stick up for what they know is right. Role-playing is a great way to help them think through how to respond and the words they could use in difficult situations.

Peer pressure, for example, can push a child to do things they wouldn't do on their own, such as try alcohol, steal, skip school, bully, etc. It can be subtle. Talk through how they might experience it and practice assertive responses.

Talk about what bullying is and prepare them for the possibility that kids could try to hurt them physically or emotionally, including online. Share ideas on how to respond, such as projecting confident body language, ignoring remarks, and telling an adult. Be sure they know that you can and will help. Then be alert for behavior that is out of character that could indicate they are being bullied.