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Book Review

Six Tools to Relieve Your Child's "Back-to-School-itis"

By

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(HealthNewsDigest.com) - For some kids, going back to school at the end of summer can be traumatic. Anticipating a new teacher, classmates, grade, or school can trigger fear, anxiety, and depression--not to mention very real physical symptoms such as stomachaches, headaches, and insomnia.

Fortunately, your child has a whole toolbox to draw from--in her own imagination. Here are six imagination tools parents can use with young children to relieve "back-to-school-itis."

Teach her to balloon breathe. With her hands around her navel, have her breathe slowly and deeply into her lower belly so it presses into her hands like an inflating balloon. The Balloon Breath has dramatic calming effects and facilitates a waking state of focused concentration and receptivity to positive suggestions. This one tool makes all the other ones easier.

Visit his special place. This is a safe private place within your child's inner world where he can work out problems or take a mini-vacation from stress and worry. He can invite a wise Animal Friend into his special place to talk to and help him, or he can even dig for a treasure box there that contains the antidote to his fear.

Draw the fear. Putting an image on paper: (1) makes her fear of separation realer and less frightening than keeping it inside, and (2) makes her fear less likely to grow because there is a concrete picture to work with. Once she has a picture, she can talk to it, find out why it's trying to scare her, strike a bargain with it, surround it with a soothing color bubble, and so on.

Talk to his symptom. When a child suffers from a worry headache or stomachache, these three questions can help eliminate the pain. Have him do deep balloon breathing (diaphragmatic breathing), then ask: (1) What color is it? (2) What shape is it? (3) How heavy is it? After more breaths, ask him again. Continue to breathe and question in rounds. His pain will likely change or disappear. If it doesn't completely go away, ask the ache what it wants him to know, do, or understand to release any more bits of pain.

Picture the future. Artwork is also an effective starting point when you're working with clear end-goals, like getting a good night's sleep or reducing a fear. Have your child draw two drawings--how things are now and how she'd like them to be. Hang the picture in her bedroom; this is a great reminder of her desired goal and the first step toward getting there.

Encourage drama. For kids whose nature tends toward drama, acting out their worries and troubles is a wonderful way to release them. Let them play it out--with puppets, with their bodies, with anything their imagination suggests. It's amazing what creative solutions come up when given free reign.

Charlotte Reznick is a child educational psychologist, an associate clinical professor of psychology at UCLA, and author of a new book, *The Power of Your Child's Imagination: How to Transform Stress and Anxiety into Joy and Success* (Perigee, 2009, \$14.95).

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