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## Back to school advice for students with special needs



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Going back to school is often a challenge, but it can be especially stressful for students with special needs and their families. In this edition of expert corner, Dr. Scott Barkin and Gina Maranga of the Block Institute in Brooklyn, NY discuss strategies to ease the transition from summertime to school time.



### Prepare early for changes

Preparation is often the key to easing transitions for students with special needs. The transition after the summer break can be wrought with emotions – sadness, anticipation, excitement and anxiety about a new school year, and for some, fear of the unknown.

- Take your child to visit a new school at least a week before school begins. This helps build positive anticipation and dispels any anxiety that your child might be experiencing.

- Read familiar books, sing familiar school songs, and talk with your child about their prior positive school experiences. The school bus and school friends are a good way of reminding and preparing your child for what lies ahead.
- Talk about the fall season and favorite activities that are coming up, such as pumpkin and apple picking and falling leaves.
- Remind your child that it is time to join clubs and team sports.
- Include your child in shopping for school supplies and new clothes. Children who select a new book bag, lunch box or clothes for the first day of school gain a sense of control over what is to come in the days ahead and positively anticipate the upcoming experience.

#### Adjust to changes and create routines

Going back to school also brings with it changes to your child's daily routine – earlier bedtimes, earlier mornings, and structured days – all of which may have been relaxed during the summer break.

- Use a calendar to count down the days until school begins to give your child a better sense of when school will be resuming.
- Use the calendar to plan fun activities for the remaining days of summer.
- It is important to establish routines for bedtime and mornings before school starts. Ease into new routines gradually. Review these routines with your child so he or she knows what to expect.
- Discuss homework routines before school begins. This helps children with the overall adjustment of returning to school while empowering them in taking on responsibility.
- Establish an end of summer tradition to mark the start of a new school year. This can be a barbeque with family and friends, a day at the beach, a weekend trip, or a family fun day at home. Your child will look forward to these traditions and they will bring comfort as a new school year begins.

#### Review previously learned academic material

Take time with your child to review their work from the past year or throughout the summer. This will reinforce what was learned and keep them on track for the start of the new school year.

#### Work with school teachers and staff

Initiate working with the educational and clinical team early in the year rather than waiting to be contacted. Share strategies that have been beneficial to your child. Begin the process as early as possible so that your child benefits from a collaborative and coordinated team that includes the family along with educators and any therapeutic personnel.

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dedicated to serving the needs of children and adults with disabilities. [Visit the Block Institute.](#)