

Wednesday, 24 January 2018

## Kids Helpline's tips for beating back to school stress

Going back to school, starting school for the first time, transitioning to high school – all can bring with it new challenges and uncertainties for both parents and kids but there are lots we can do that can help.

According to **yourtown/Kids Helpline** Head of Client Services Brendan Bourke, parents know school can be crucial to their child's development with school transitions often bringing anxiety and stress.

"Transitioning to a new school year is an important time when children and young people can learn to develop coping strategies, problem solving skills and ways of seeing and understanding the world that will contribute to their wellbeing now and into the future," Mr Bourke said.

"Our best advice for parents at this time is to be excited. If you're enthusiastic and confident, your children will be too. Kids Helpline believes that by providing acceptance, encouragement and support to children - and also remembering to look after your own wellbeing - parents and carers can help ensure the new school year gets off to a great start."

Prep student Emilie's Mum Cassandra Springer is one of the many thousands of parents excited to be seeing their child off to their first day of school.

"I'm excited for her and also a little nervous, hoping she makes friends and is not too overwhelmed by what's ahead," Ms Springer said.

"I've done the best I can to get her ready and she's really looking forward to being at school. She told me she wants to do art and craft all day and learn more about dinosaurs. I'm sure she will!"

Mr Bourke said children and young people call Kids Helpline about any number of things during the back to school period.

"Anxiety about making new friends or changes in friendships due to the long break are some of the most common concerns faced by children when starting a new school year," he said.

"Mental Health (23%), family relationships (19%) and emotional wellbeing (17%) are the top three reasons that children and young people contact Kids Helpline the year 'round."<sup>1</sup>

Mental health challenges can significantly impact a child's life, and if not addressed early can impact on all aspects of their lives including learning and education, and in the longer term, employment. The estimated economic cost of mental illness to Australia could be as high as \$40 billion.<sup>2</sup>

Mr Bourke said that while the role that parents play in fostering positive wellbeing for their children is vital, how schools can help children adapt and thrive is also important.

"Kids Helpline is here to give support not only by being here for children and young people 24/7 via our phone and online help service, but by linking in with schools via our free Kids Helpline @ School Wellbeing program delivered direct to classrooms across Australia," Mr Bourke said.

"Kids Helpline @ School Wellbeing is an early intervention and prevention education program for primary school students, covering topics that include bullying, resilience, friendships and good mental health. Professional counsellors talk with students and their teachers in group class sessions via digital technology."

**yourtown** CEO Tracy Adams said she was excited to announce that this year Kids Helpline was expanding its Wellbeing schools program thanks to an exciting new partnership with health and care company Bupa Australia.

"Since 2013, we've reached more than 69,000 primary school students via our Kids Helpline @ School programs, with around half of those participating in sessions focused on Wellbeing topics," Ms Adams said.

"We know from experience that early intervention is the key to changing and saving lives. Bupa's support means we can create even more opportunities to support and protect primary school children through awareness and encouraging help seeking. Thousands more children will benefit from the Wellbeing school program and we will also be able to create tools to support teachers and parents about what matters most – the wellbeing of our children."

Bupa Australia Chief Executive Officer Richard Bowden said the organisation was pleased to be working with Kids Helpline to make a difference to the emotional wellbeing of primary school children, helping set them up for life.

"At any time, one in four young people in Australia are at risk of serious mental health issues. We were looking for an organisation to partner with which not only aligned to Bupa's purpose of helping people live longer, healthier, happier lives, but also an organisation which would make a real difference to the mental wellbeing of people in Australia," Mr Bowden said.

Kids Helpline is Australia's only free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service specifically for children and young people aged 5 to 25 years. **FREE call 1800 55 1800 or [www.kidshelpline.com.au](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au)**

Bupa is a diverse health and care group which has been committed to a purpose of longer, healthier, happier lives for close to 70 years.

### KIDS HELPLINE'S BACK TO SCHOOL TIPS FOR PARENTS/CARERS

1. Be excited about the new change. If you are enthusiastic and confident, your children will be too.
2. Plan clothes and lunches the night before to avoid the early morning rush and any unnecessary stress.
3. Most schools will provide an opportunity to visit with your child before the first day to familiarise and explore areas of interest. Take advantage of this.
4. Start and maintain daily routines that will add structure and make your child more at ease e.g. dropping your child off at school at the same time each morning.
5. For children catching public transport, do some practice runs so they are confident about what train or bus they need to catch. Develop a Plan B (and C) on what to do if they miss a bus or train.
6. Don't forget a healthy and nutritious breakfast. Students are more alert and perform better at school if they eat a good breakfast.
7. Make sure your child gets plenty of sleep each night during the school week.
8. Take 15 minutes out at the end of the school day to listen to your child's stories.
9. Take time out for yourself. It can also be an emotional time for parents, particularly when little ones are going to school for the first time. That first drop off can be a teary one – and not necessarily for the kids! It always helps to talk with someone about how you're feeling. Reach out to another parent for a cup of coffee and a chat.

### KIDS HELPLINE @ SCHOOL WELLBEING TOPICS FOR SCHOOLS

- **Bullying** – helping students identify, manage and prevent bullying
- **Developing resilience** – helping students learn to bounce back and deal with challenges and changes
- **Friendships** – developing healthy friendships and conflict resolution skills
- **Managing emotions** – mental health literacy and emotional self-regulation
- **Transition to High School** – coping with change and strengthening essential skills.

For more tips for parents and carers about supporting their children see [www.kidshelpline.com.au/parents](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au/parents).

Primary schools can find out more about accessing the free Kids Helpline @ School Wellbeing program at <https://kidshelpline.com.au/schools/kids-helpline-school>

1 Kids Helpline (2017). Kids Helpline Insights Report. Percentages are based on a total of 66,963 contacts seeking counselling support in 2016.  
2 Commonwealth of Australia (2015). Australian Government Response to Contributing Lives, Thriving Communities - Review of Mental Health Programmes and Services. <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/mental-review-response>. Accessed 15 January 2017.

**ENDS**

### INTERVIEW/PHOTO OPPORTUNITIES

Brendan Bourke, **yourtown** Head of Client Services  
Tony Fitzgerald, Kids Helpline Virtual Services Manager and Kids Helpline Counsellors  
Prep student Mum Cassandra Springer available for interview (Qld based)  
Kids Helpline and Kids Helpline @ School VNR available

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