

Friday, 25 January 2019

Kids Helpline's top wellbeing tips for this school year

As children across Australia begin a new school year, Kids Helpline is reminding families to keep an eye on their children's wellbeing at what can be anxious and stressful time for kids.

It's not surprising that heading back to school or the important step of starting school for the first time can be a stressful time for kids.

According to Kids Helpline Manager Tony FitzGerald, children and young people call the 24/7 counselling and support service about any number of worries during the back to school period.

"We see more contacts from kids who are stressed or anxious at this time because things at home can be a little more stressful," Mr FitzGerald said.

"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.

"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.

"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."

New Queensland prep student Maks' Mum Karla Jurczakowski is one of the many thousands of parents preparing their child for their first day of school.

"Maks is really excited to start school this year. He's most excited about being a big boy and going to school like his sisters do, and in particular wearing his school shoes!" Ms Jurczakowski said.

Mr FitzGerald 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.

"Schools can also do their part to help children transition to school and deal with challenges through the year by tapping in on programs like the free Kids Helpline @ School Wellbeing supported by Bupa," he said.

"Mental Health and emotional wellbeing are some of the top reasons that children and young people contact Kids Helpline the year 'round.

"These 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.

"Kids Helpline @ School Wellbeing aims to address concerns like these early on and help create resilient young people. An early intervention and prevention education program for primary school students, the program covers topics that include bullying, resilience, friendships and good mental health. Made possible thanks to the support of Bupa, it uses digital technology to link professional counsellors with students and their teachers in interactive education sessions.

Mr FitzGerald said that in the last year more than 15,000 students took part in the Wellbeing program across 196 primary schools nationally.

"Kids Helpline @ School Wellbeing is particularly valuable to remote areas of Australia that may not have access to local support services," he said.

"We are fortunate that Bupa has partnered with Kids Helpline to fund our school based program aimed at intervening and preventing mental health and other wellbeing issues for children at a young age.

"This support can ultimately reduce the need for young people to reach out to helplines like Kids Helpline about mental health and other concerns. The need is great. In 2018, there were 360,773 attempts by children and young people to contact Kid Helpline's online and phone counselling service but we were able to respond to less than half of these (147,351)."

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

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

1. Re-establishing healthy sleep patterns is one of the most important things for healthy growing minds and bodies. Research suggests that kids and teenagers need between 8 and 10 hours of sleep a night;
2. Re-establishing boundaries in relation to technology use. This can include setting expectations in relation to screen time – particularly leading up to bed time. The use of parental controls in conjunction with good communication with your kids can help reduce stress around this.
3. Be excited about the new change. If you are enthusiastic and confident, your children will be too.
4. Plan clothes and lunches the night before to avoid the early morning rush and any unnecessary stress.
5. 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.
6. Start and maintain daily routines that will add structure and make your child more at ease.
7. 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.
8. Don't forget a healthy and nutritious breakfast. Students are more alert and perform better at school if they eat a good breakfast.
9. Make sure your child gets plenty of sleep each night during the school week.
10. Encourage your child to share some of the highlights of their day.
11. 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.

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

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.

ENDS

INTERVIEW/PHOTO OPPORTUNITIES

VNR is available for Kids Helpline and Kids Helpline @ School and features Back to School interviews with:

- Prep student Maks and his older sisters – one starting high school and their Mum Karla Jurczakowski including footage at their home and preparing for and going to school
 - Tony Fitzgerald, Kids Helpline Virtual Services Manager
- Additional interviews are available on request (Qld based)

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