**Coping with the “back-to-school blues”**

By Jean Berrier-Tate, School Psychologist

Returning to school after summer break (or starting school for the first time) can be a stressful time for both parents and children. Anticipation of dealing with the “unknown” - a new class or school, using the school bus for the first time, encountering more difficult subjects, even eating in the school cafeteria for the first time can fuel fears and anxieties in children and parents. Changes in routines, getting up earlier, homework, even additional financial burdens (new school supplies, clothes, etc.) can add to a family’s stress at the beginning of the school year.

Here are some ideas for coping with the stress of returning to (or starting) school.

Establish a consistent routine as soon as possible - ideally before school starts back. Getting plenty of rest will help children be more relaxed and ready to deal with new experiences. (We all get cranky when we over-tired.)

Get organized - Preparing ahead will make the mornings smoother and avoid last-minutes conflicts than can start out the school day on the wrong foot. Packing book bags, signing papers, and laying out clothing the night before can reduce stress in the morning and make your child feel more prepared and confident.

Talk to your child. Empathize with your children’s feelings – but encourage them to recognize that while change can be scary, there are often many positive results as well – new friends, new skills, etc. Let them know you are there to help them through the process. It is important to convey to your children that you are confident in their ability and encourage them to face their fears and work through any problems. Allowing your child to escape or avoid situations (picking them up early, allowing them to stay home, etc.) is not a good idea and will make it more difficult for him/her to adjust.

If your children cry, cling to you or tantrums when you leave them, try your best to stay very calm and positive. Tell them good-by and that you will see them at the end of the day (after daycare, etc.). Although it may be tempting, don’t “sneak away” as this may create more anxiety. (I know as a parent whose child cried every day for several weeks in the first grade- this is VERY hard on parents – but “Keep calm and carry on” – it almost always gets better in a few days or weeks.) It is probably best not to visit during the school day for the first few weeks until your child is better adjusted.

Getting involved in your child’s school is a great way for you and your child to develop positive relationships and feel more comfortable in the school environment. There are a number of ways to get involved. Check with your child’s teacher and/or the PTA for suggestions.

Finally, if your child continues to have separation difficulties that last more than a few weeks, talk with your child’s teacher, the school counselor, or the school psychologist for more assistance.