



SCOTT PSYCHOLOGY TIMES

Your Source for School Psychology Ideas and Insights

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Tips for a Great Beginning to a Great Year



The lazy days of summer are over and the vast majority of children, whether they admit it or not, look forward to the start of a new

school year. They are eager to be around other kids again, renew friendships, make new friends and yes, they want to learn new things. But they are also nervous about the new year, and the eager attitude that parents and teachers relish may be suddenly replaced with sadness or tears during the first weeks of school. Here are a few suggestions for easing the transition and getting the year off to a good start.

Class Rules. Rules and routines benefit students throughout the year, so start the year off with firm expectations about behavior. Introduce rules (including consequences) to the class on the first day of school. To create buy-in, you might let the class help develop the list of rules. You can guide the conversation to ensure the list is thorough.

Relationship Building. During the first week of school, get to know your students. In

addition to learning their names, try to learn at least one personal thing about each of your students (e.g., an interest, hobby, or strength that defines them). You are going to be a mentor in the months to come, and your influence will be considerably stronger if you can relate to a personal aspect of each child in your class.

You should also connect with your students' families. For example, send home a newsletter or letter. It should provide insight into what your plans are for the year, what your approach to teaching is and what you expect from parents in assisting with this. Tell parents how to get in touch with you if they have questions. Have students get this signed and returned so that parents have incentive to read it.

Friendship Building. Each teacher has different ways of encouraging positive friendships within the classroom. Identify your strategies before school starts. Setting desks up in small groups, having daily classroom ice breakers, planning weekly group projects and other things like this can foster friendships in the classroom. Set up some lessons on respect and kindness that are age-appropriate for making sure that these experiences are positive.

Demanding Academics. In order to keep up with the new academic material and learning demands, students must further develop their learning and thinking habits. Start the year off by actively teaching and modeling strategies your students will find helpful. For example, you might include strategies for organizing, planning, studying, monitoring comprehension, etc.

Homework. Many teachers make the first week easy, which actually makes it harder for kids to get in the school groove. Start making assignments, including homework assignments, on the very first day of school. This is also important in helping you to gain a good early assessment of your students' strengths and opportunities for improvement.

Fun Fridays. Fridays are a great day to offer rewards, downtime, an educational movie, etc. – something that recognizes that you all got through the week. Start this by doing something special with your class on the first Friday of the year.

From a variety of sources. Contact Dr. Scott for the list.

Ice Breakers and Team Builders

Animal Groups

- Determine how many small groups you want, and choose the appropriate number of animals.
- Give each student a slip of paper with the name of an animal on it.
- Students locate the other members of their animal group by imitating that animal's sound only. No talking is allowed.
- Students might hesitate initially, but that will soon give way to moos, snorts, and giggles as they get into groups.
- For older students, you could use a variation (e.g., movie characters, authors, famous historical figures, etc.).

Get Up and Move

- Have students sit in a circle. Stand in the middle of the circle.
- Say to the group, "Get up and move if..." Complete the sentence with the phrase of your choosing.
- Examples: ...you are an only child.
...you have lived outside Florida.
...you have a pet.
...you love to read.
...you went on vacation this summer.
- Everyone who can relate to the statement must get up and move to a different chair.
- Whoever is left without a seat should stand in the middle and continue the exercise.

Similarities and Differences

- Organize the class into groups of 4 or 5.
- Give each group a sheet of paper labeled "Similarities." Give students a few minutes to list the qualities that are shared by their group.
- Give each group a second sheet of paper labeled "Differences." Give students a few minutes to list the aspects that are unique to only one member of their group.
- Ask each group to share their findings with the class.

H1N1 Flu: Talking With Children about Illness



Concern over the H1N1 Flu (also referred to as the Swine Flu) can make children and adults anxious. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports uncertainty about how it will affect Americans this

fall. Of particular concern is the affect it may have on schools. As we begin the new school year, it's an excellent time to refresh our knowledge about communicating with children about illness and major outbreaks.

Acknowledging some level of concern, without panicking, is appropriate and can result in people taking action to reduce the risk of illness. Helping children cope with anxiety regarding the flu requires providing prevention information without causing alarm.

Children look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events. If parents or teachers seem overly worried, children may panic. Adults should reassure children that health and school officials are working hard to ensure that people throughout the country stay healthy. However, children also need factual, age-appropriate information about the potential seriousness of disease risk and concrete instruction about how to avoid infection and spread of the virus. Teaching children positive preventive measures, talking with them about their fears, and giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infection can help reduce anxiety.

Specific Guidelines

Remain calm and reassuring.

Children will react to and follow adults' verbal and nonverbal reactions. What you say and do about the flu virus and current prevention efforts can either increase or decrease a child's anxiety. Remind children that you and the other adults in their lives are there to keep them safe and healthy. Let children talk about their feelings and help put their concerns into the appropriate perspective.



Make yourself available. Children may need extra attention from parents and teachers and may want to talk about their concerns and questions. Make time for them and reinforce how much you care.

Know the symptoms of an illness and how it spreads. For example, symptoms of the

H1N1 flu include fever, sore throat, and cough. Some people also have a runny nose, fatigue, body aches, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. The virus is transmitted through the coughing or sneezing of people infected with the virus. People may also become infected by touching something with the flu virus on it and then touching their mouths or noses. The virus is not spread by eating pork or other foods.



Review basic hygiene

practices. Encourage children to practice everyday good hygiene by washing their

hands, covering their mouths with a tissue when they sneeze or cough, and not sharing food or drinks.

These simple steps are very effective at preventing the spread of flu and other illnesses. Giving children guidance on what they can do to prevent infection gives them a greater sense of control over the flu and will help to reduce their anxiety.

Be honest and accurate. In the absence of factual information, children often imagine situations far worse than reality. Don't ignore their concerns, but rather explain that at the present moment the vast majority of people, even those who are sick, will be okay. Children can be told that there are many ways to avoid the virus and that doctors can help to treat people who do get sick. Contact your school nurse and/or refer families to the CDC or county health department for continuing, up-to-date information.

Discuss new rules or practices at school.

Many schools will be enforcing prevention habits. This might include more frequent hand washing or use of antibacterial soaps; for older children, schools may temporarily limit activities where students are in close proximity or sharing items. Share this information with students, discuss the rationale, and answer questions.

Maintain a normal routine to the extent possible.

Keeping to a regular schedule can be reassuring and promotes physical health. Encourage children to get plenty of sleep, regular meals, and exercise. Follow the regular academic schedule. Be prepared to create "sick packets" with lessons and homework for students who may be out with symptoms so that they can stay engaged with learning while they are home.

Maintain open school-home communication.

Let parents know what the school is doing to encourage good hygiene and what special precautions or procedures have been put into place. Encourage parents and children to talk to your school nurse, school psychologist, or guidance counselor if they are having difficulties as a result of anxiety or stress related to the flu.



Adapted from Talking to Children About Swine Flu (H1N1): A Parent Resource by the National Association of School Psychologists, National Association of School Nurses, and National Parent Teacher Association.

Online Resource

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



H1N1 Flu & Vaccine Information
www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu

Just a Thought...

Do not wait! The time will never be "just right." Start where you stand and work with whatever tools you may have at your command and better tools will be found as you go along.

~Napoleon Hill

So it is with children who learn to read fluently and well: They begin to take flight into whole new worlds as effortlessly as young birds take to the sky.

~William James

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