

PARENT CONVERSATIONS

The beginning of the school year can be a time of great excitement—buying new school supplies, reuniting with friends, and learning new skills. Sometimes, though, that excitement turns quickly to anxiety as struggles set in. It hurts my heart to see any of my children struggle like that, yet to varying degrees, each one of them has struggled to adapt to a new school year at some point. After all, change is hard. In this month’s “Parent conversations,” a Christian counselor and a grade-school teacher offer advice on how to help your child if he or she struggles this year.

—Nicole Balza

HOW DO I HELP A CHILD WHO IS STRUGGLING TO ADAPT TO THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR?

STARTING ANYTHING new can feel both stressful and exciting at the same time. The beginning of a school year can be especially overwhelming because everything is new for everyone in the family all at once. As families work to establish school-year routines, parents may struggle to find enough time and energy to support their children in their new grades, classes, and activities. As parents, we hope and pray that our children thrive and adapt quickly to the new school year. But what if they don’t? What if our children are really struggling? What if it isn’t just one bad day?

We all have hard days; however, it is important to notice when children are consistently struggling and need help.

Instead of jumping in to fix a situation for our children, we first need to listen. See them, hear them, and support them. Our children do not learn and grow when we fix their problems for them, but they also need guidance and support to learn new skills and have the confidence to do hard things. In any situation, each person involved has a different perspective. If we truly want to help our children adapt to new situations and teach them to work through challenges, we need to step back and collect information from everyone involved. Modeling this approach for our children encourages them to develop habits of connecting with others and seeking help in challenging situations, instead of judging others and creating distance.

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Asking children open-ended questions helps us understand their feelings and struggles. Their answers will guide us to other adults who can also offer support. Most likely, we will want to seek the perspectives of teachers and coaches. If children are having friendship struggles, we may want to connect with other parents to be able to work together to help kids communicate and grow. Remember that we are seeking to connect and hear other perspectives. We are not trying to place blame or find a quick fix. Building a team of supportive adults around children is a huge blessing.

After gathering multiple perspectives, we are better equipped to help our children begin tackling the challenges they face. Every child is different, and there is not a one-size-fits-all solution when life gets

hard. Children thrive when adults work together to teach new skills, support positive habits and behaviors, and love them through the hard moments. They need to know that struggle is a part of life but God helps them through their struggles. He loves them and is always with them.



Rachel Blum is a mom of three and a teacher at St. Paul, Green Bay, Wisconsin.

GONE ARE THE long, unrushed days of summer. Late bedtimes and slow mornings are about to be replaced with the hustle and bustle of a new school year. At summer's end, some kids are very ready for school to start. For others, the transition is much more challenging. If your child is struggling at the start of the new school year, take heart! This is totally normal. Many people get nervous when they face change or enter new situations. Here are several tips to help your child adjust successfully.

- 1. Listen to your child and acknowledge that the feelings are valid.** Navigating change can feel overwhelming, even for adults! Empathizing with your child and providing a safe space for sharing worries and fears can be a huge help in moving beyond those fears. As counselors, we often teach kids coping skills for any given situation: going for a walk, listening to music, taking deep breaths, or saying a prayer. You can brainstorm with your child to discover coping skills that are appropriate for your child's stress. Offer examples that work for you.
- 2. Focus on the positives.** Maybe it's getting a new backpack and school supplies. Perhaps your child has been looking forward to the teacher he or she will have or participating in extracurricular activities. Help your child find things to be excited about for the new year and direct attention to those aspects. Our thoughts have a powerful influence on our attitudes! That's why it's important to replace negative

thoughts with positive ones. This is an important skill to learn.

- 3. Set goals for the school year.** Talk with your child about what would make the school year successful. Learning a new skill like reading or multiplication? Participating in the science fair? Trying a new sport? Making a new friend? Remembering these bigger goals can help kids push through moments of stress.
- 4. Establish the new routine.** Kids thrive with structure and predictability. Creating routines can help decrease some of the nerves around school. A morning routine is what happens from wake-up until arrival at school. Try to keep it consistent from day to day. Talk with your child ahead of time if there is going to be a change in the routine. For young kids, a picture schedule can help them understand the plan more clearly.

Through it all, we can assure our kids that our loving Savior will bless their experiences in this new school year. There is nothing they will face where he will not be by their side, working everything for their good.



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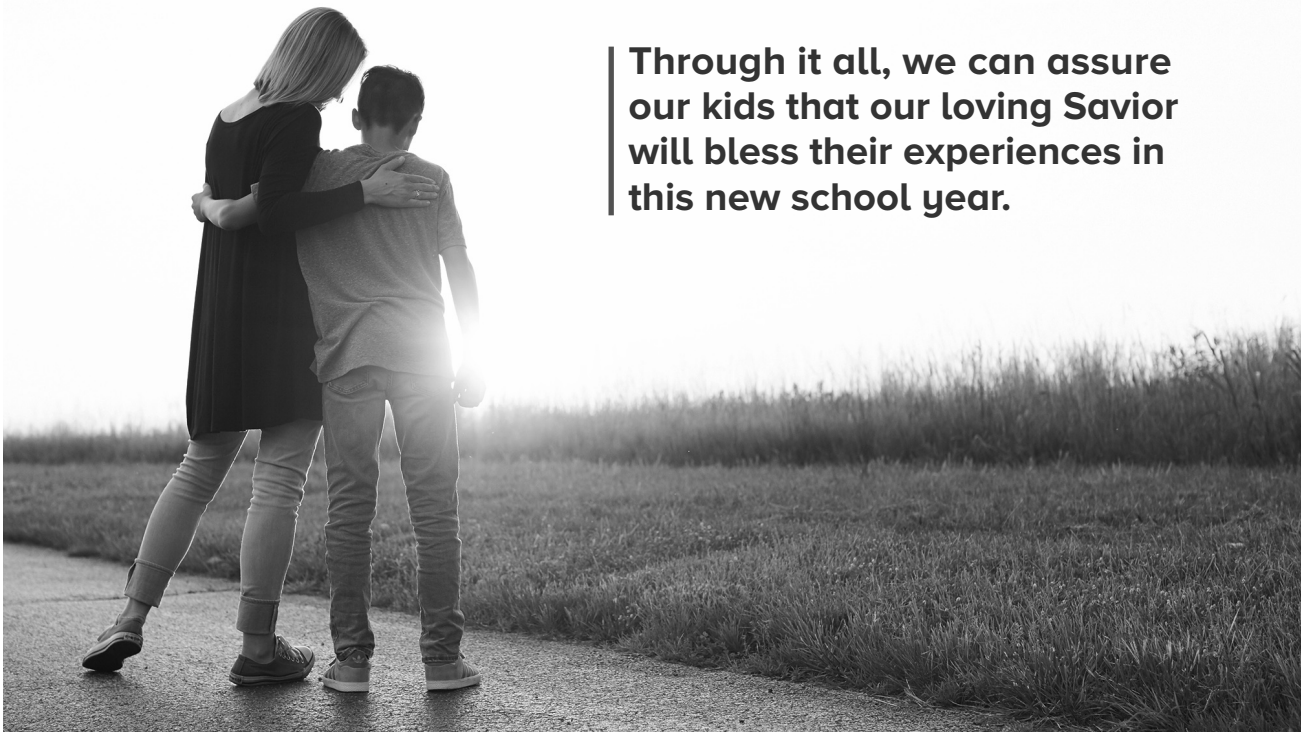


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