

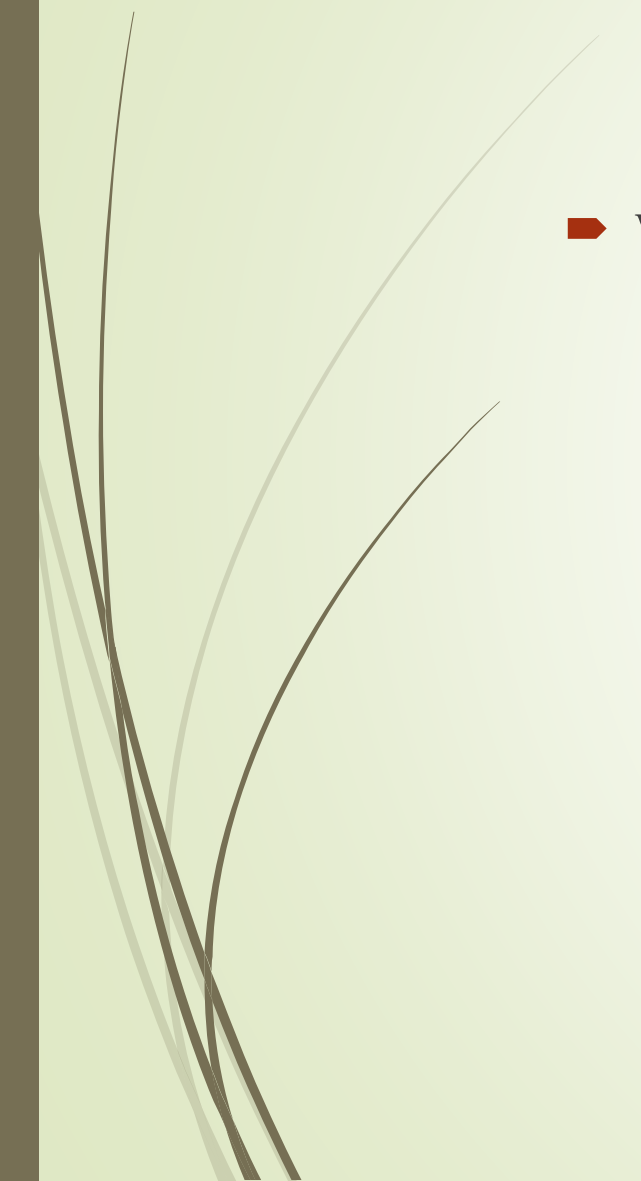


*Anxiety and Attention Series:
Helping the Child Who Struggles
with Transitions*

Dr. Rob Adams, Clinical Psychologist
Meghan Barlow and Associates



Take time to remember

- What has this school year been like for **you** and your **kids**?
What words/phrases come to mind?
- 



Take time to remember

- ▶ What has this school year been like for **you** and your **kids**?

What words/phrases come to mind?

Stressful, Anxious, Sad, Loss, Unpredictable, Health concerns/risks, Change, New skills required...

AND

Persistence, Learning new ways to be together, Learning new skills, More time in nature...



Preparing for Summer: Write **Your** Story

- ▶ Narratives are an important part of how we make sense of the world and our experiences
 - ▶ We do it already without thinking about it (“This year has been the worst.”)
 - ▶ Do it *on purpose* with the *full picture*- grief and celebration
- ▶ Help your child write a story about school year 2020-2021
 - ▶ Areas of growth and achievement
 - ▶ Stuff that did go well and stuff they would rather forget about
 - ▶ Ups and downs of the year (use specific memories)
 - ▶ Include pictures or have them draw different elements of their story
 - ▶ Include emotions
 - ▶ Ask them what emotions were present at different parts of their story
 - ▶ Write in different colors to illustrate the emotion present
- ▶ Share their story with family or friends to jointly recognize what the year has meant to them



Preparing for Summer

- ▶ Important principles that help kids with transitions and stress coping
 - ▶ **Predictability**
 - ▶ What is my day going to look like?
 - ▶ **Clarity-** *What is changing? What is not changing?*
 - ▶ What are the rules about using electronics? Bedtime? Who is in charge of what chores?
 - ▶ **Consistency**
 - ▶ Are the rules changing this week? Do they change based upon which caregiver is home?
 - ▶ **Sense of control**
 - ▶ Provide opportunities for input and decision-making as you prepare for summer (ex: Which camp or activity to attend, what part of the day is for chores, reading, free play, etc...)
- ▶ **Balance:** Incorporate these into plans for your week, Co-create a chart of what this looks like in daily life
 - ▶ Play time (unstructured)
 - ▶ Brain time (reading, writing, learning a new skill)
 - ▶ People time (family, friends)
 - ▶ Work time (chores, school-type work)
 - ▶ Body time (exercise, healthy eating, sleep/rest, sunshine!)



Emotional Health Plate

▶ Balanced plate, just like for your physical health.

▶ Play time

▶ Ride my bike

▶ Build a fort

▶ Brain time

▶ Write a letter to my cousin

▶ Build a model car

▶ People time

▶ Go to the park with _____
(be specific)

▶ Family movie/game night, trip to the park...

▶ Work time

▶ Learn to fold clean laundry

▶ Read

▶ Body time

▶ Try a new food

▶ Be outside for 2 hours

*Use the chart for a weekly check-in to see what needs to be increased



Know your kid

- ▶ What is best for one child may not be best for another
 - ▶ Is my child hungry for social interaction? Content? Anxious?
 - ▶ The answer will guide what type of social experiences you incorporate into your summer plans and how quickly you do so. Start in the shallow end!
 - ▶ Is my child too attached to electronic devices?
 - ▶ Does my child need to have regular interactions with school-related skills
 - ▶ Academics- reading, writing, math
 - ▶ Executive functions- time management, organization, planning the steps to a task
 - ▶ Be clear about what is negotiable and non-negotiable (i.e. You have to read for 20 minutes, but you pick where you read and which book to read first.)
 - ▶ Structure for the day
 - ▶ Some kids wake up energetic and ready for physical activity
 - ▶ Some want to get non-preferred tasks over at the beginning of the day



Technology:

What is my relationship to it?

- Clarify what a healthy relationship to technology looks like, and how to know if it's an unhealthy relationship
 - How much do I think about it when I'm not using it?
 - What is my mood when I have to stop using it?
 - Do I enjoy other toys, games, activities, and people?
 - Is it supporting or hindering your child's development (cognitive, emotional, social, etc...)
 - **Model it!**
 - Tech-free time as a family for family traditions, after-dinner walk or other physical activity

Emotion Cup



- ▶ **We** (adults and kids) handle stress and transitions best when our cup is not empty, and when it is filled regularly.
 - ▶ What fills your cup? Your child's cup?
 - ▶ Exercise, friends, time outside, time alone, games, nature, laughter, learning something new, helping others, one-on-one time, doing things they choose and enjoy...
 - ▶ Create a jar of “**cup-fillers**”
 - ▶ Pull an idea from the jar when feeling sad, anxious, frustrated, or even bored
 - ▶ Create a family jar and set aside a weekly time for doing a joint activity
 - ▶ Be aware of what is emptying your child's cup
 - ▶ Loneliness, punishment and yelling, rejection, doing things they are forced to do or dislike





Emotional Intelligence

Permission to Feel: Unlocking the Power of Emotions to Help our Kids, Ourselves, and our Society Thrive by Marc Brackett, Ph.D.

- Skills that promote emotional well-being and flexibility
- Skills that help with emotion coping
- Consider skill development like you would skills in other areas of life:
Teach, Model, Practice, Reinforce

- Recognize
- Understand
- Label
- Express
- Regulate

<https://www.rulerapproach.org/>



For the anxious child

- ▶ Promote **flexibility**

- ▶ Point it out and praise it regularly
- ▶ Use emotion intelligence skills and Yes Brain
- ▶ Plan ways to practice it in more difficult situations (Add to their Emotional Health Plate)
 - ▶ Social Anxiety: Notice nervousness at playground, but still join other kids in play
 - ▶ Separation Anxiety: Plan playdates or activities where a parent will not be present
 - ▶ Covid-19 related: Go unfamiliar places or be around larger groups of people

- ▶ Coping strategies

- ▶ Physical/Sensory focus
- ▶ Remember when _____

- ▶ *The Yes Brain: How to Cultivate Courage, Curiosity, and Resilience in Your Child* by Daniel Siegel, Ph.D., and Tina Bryson, Ph.D.



Celebrate



- ▶ Our children have done something no children have been required to do before. Time for cake!
 - ▶ Literally. Go get cake. Or something. Have a dance party. Celebrate!
- ▶ Growth
- ▶ New skills
- ▶ School year during a pandemic
- ▶ Persistence
- ▶ Expert mask-wearer