

Helping Kids Cope With Summer Anxiety

By Dr. Christopher A. Flessner

The days are getting hotter and longer...and the kids are home from school; what's a parent to do? Summer vacation usually signals a change in routine, which often leads to anxiety.

Most kids – like adults- thrive on routine. We all like to know what to expect. When something unexpected happens, it can sometimes throw us for a loop. School is all about routine. Kids do the same things day in and day out. In some kids, the change in routine can lead to increased anxiety and worry. But there are solutions.

By developing a “Summer routine” (e.g. waking up and going to bed at set times; having meals at set times; keeping a calendar of events for the day/week/month), parents can help children cope with the anxiety of knowing just what to expect from day to day.

Boredom is also a concern for children during summer vacation. When adults get bored, we find something productive to do (e.g. go for a bike ride, drive to a store). But kids, particularly younger kids, don't have the same kind of freedom as adults do.

For anxious kids, boredom gives their minds a chance to dwell on all the things in the world that they shouldn't have to worry about...but do. Parents can help combat this boredom by working with them to develop a list of activities they can post on the refrigerator. When boredom sets in, kids can defer to this list (which they helped to create) and play some of the fun games or activities. Keeping a basic schedule during summer will also help the family to identify potential “boredom zones” and come up with plans to fight off boredom.

And then there is the month of August, which represents the end of summer fun and the start of the new school year. Suddenly the kids have to prepare for new teachers, new classes and maybe even making new friends. For anxious kids, August can be particularly difficult because their school-related worries can start to creep up.

These worries tend to get worse closer to when school begins. Parents can help by making the “going back to school” process as fun as possible (e.g. letting your son/daughter pick out favorite pencils, or first day of school outfit, etc.). Parents can also help their children prepare for school by shifting their summer schedule to more closely fit with what the child's school schedule will be like (e.g. waking/sleeping and eating at “school year” times). Finally, parents can reassure their children that a lot of other kids are nervous about the first day of school. A little reassurance can go a long way.

If you are noticing your child is feeling anxious about summer vacation and you have questions or would like support in preparing for summer vacation please contact the Family School Liaison Counsellor, Melissa Gleeson by email at mgleeson@lrsd.ab.ca or by phone at 403-625 4464.