

Mindfully Back to School

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As children return back to school after the summer holidays parents often wonder how they can best support their child throughout the new school year.

Parents are often very anxious to give their child the best opportunities possible, enrolling their child in numerous after-school activities and homework clubs. The overall focus can be very much about their child's academic performance and achievements.

I think it can be very helpful at this time of year to take a step back and look at what is really important for our children from a broader perspective. Ask yourself what is it I really want for my child? Often the answer comes down to us wanting happiness and wellbeing for our children more than anything else. A different question we can then ask is how can I support my child's happiness and wellbeing throughout this new school year?

A large study by Clarke, Fleche, Layard, Powdthavee & Ward, 2018 found that the biggest predictor of adult life satisfaction was emotional health as a child and the least important predictor of adult life satisfaction was intellectual performance as a child. Of course children's academic learning is very important but as a society we are often guilty of prioritising it over their emotional well-being. The interesting thing is that when children are happy and relaxed their focus and concentration will be better and they will learn and perform better academically also.



The first step in supporting your child's emotional well-being as they return to school and throughout the school year is to nurture your own. One of the best ways to do this is through Mindfulness and Self Compassion practices which has been shown to have many benefits for our mental and physical health.

Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention to the present moment, on purpose and without judgement. We can practice mindfulness by bringing our attention to what we are doing in "the here and now". When we drink our cup of tea, we can bring our full attention to the taste, temperature and the feeling of the cup in our hands. When we have our shower we can notice how the water feels on our skin.

We can notice when our mind wanders away and bring back our focus to what we are experiencing in the present moment.

It is also very important to bring a sense of kindness and friendship to our attention. So many parents can be self critical, comparing themselves to other parents and feeling like they are just not good enough. Try developing a kind, non judgemental relationship with yourself. Ask yourself, would I speak to a good friend the way I speak to myself and if the answer is no try relating to yourself with more kindness and compassion.

Although this may be difficult at first, with practice it becomes much easier. Listening to online mindfulness and self compassion meditations can be a huge help and if you feel like you need more support try joining a local mindfulness class.

When parents are actively looking after their own wellbeing they will be much better equipped to support their child throughout the busy school year. Children are also very sensitive to parents stress levels and emotions. If you are feeling strong and emotionally well, children will respond to that. We often teach much more by our attitude and behaviours than in the words we say.

Returning to school after the summer brings up all sorts of emotions for children. One of the most beneficial things that parents can do is to normalise their child's emotions. I would encourage families to spend time

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