

A Guide for

Working Caregivers

During the Back to School Transition

As the new school year approaches, managing the demands of work and family life can become overwhelming for parents, caregivers, and guardians. This guide offers practical strategies to help you prioritize your mental well-being during this transition period. Utilizing these techniques will help teach your child stress management, too.

If you or your child are managing a mental health condition, transitions can be especially challenging as you work to maintain you or your child's mental health in addition to making the necessary changes during the transition time. Planning ahead can help the transition go much smoother and ensure everyone can stay healthy!

Tips for Managing Stress:

1. Establish Routine:

- a. Create a family calendar together. Block off time for school drop-offs, extracurriculars, and family events.
- b. Look for an app that can help you prioritize tasks and track chores.
- c. Establish time to reconnect with family and friends throughout the day. This can look like reading to your children at night before bed or texting a friend about your day during lunch.
- d. If you or your child are managing a mental health condition, maintaining your routine is especially important. Continue following your treatment plan and see your provider regularly.

2. Practice Self-Care:

- a. Include plans for self-care in your daily schedule to recharge and stay resilient. This can look like exercise, meditation, or hobbies, but take the little opportunities for yourself, too.
 - i. Listen to a podcast or your favorite music.
 - ii. Reclaim time that's just for you, whether that's in the car or in the shower.
 - iii. Try going for a daily walk, or simply giving yourself peaceful moments like sitting quietly with an afternoon cup of tea or taking deep breaths in your car before entering your home.

3. Set Realistic Expectations:

- a. Notice what control you do have and where you might be able to ask for help. Setting realistic expectations can help you notice what you can do, rather than all the things that feel impossible.
 - i. Write down three sensible goals you want to achieve during the transition for both work and home, allowing room for adjustments.

Find Your Network of Helpers

1. At Work:

- a. Let your employer know about your family responsibilities and any adjustments needed during the transition.
- ii. Discuss sharing workloads with colleagues to help each other out.
- iii. Chat with managers about the upcoming temporary transition time and be clear about expectations.

2. At Home:

- a. Set aside time each week to discuss schedules, responsibilities, and concerns, ensuring everyone feels heard and supported.
- i. Let each family member know the importance of their role in the transition, how they can be helpful, and set clear expectations.

3. At School:

- a. Have a conversation with your child's teacher to establish expectations and develop the parent/teacher partnership.
 - i. Keep an eye out for "Meet the Teacher" nights before school starts or shortly into the new school year.
 - ii. If you don't have time to meet with your child's teacher, sending an introductory email can also help build a connection.
- b. Consider discussing Individual Education Programs (IEP) with the school if your child needs additional support in the classroom.
 - i. Find more information on [NAMI's website](#).

4. In Your Community:

- a. Connect with other parents or support groups to share experiences and gain valuable insights.
 - i. Join a carpool with trusted parents and caregivers.
 - ii. Introduce yourself to other parents at parent/teacher conferences.
 - iii. Join online groups for local parents or follow parenting accounts on your chosen social media.

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Making More Time:

1. Explore Flexible Work Arrangements:

- a. Explore flexible work options like remote work or adjusted hours to accommodate school schedules.
 - i. If your workplace can't be flexible, check in with your child's school to see if there's before- or after-care programs.
 - ii. Carpool with other trusted parents and caregivers.

2. Delegate Responsibilities:

- a. Choose a household task to share with a family member or older children to lighten the load and foster a sense of teamwork.
 - i. Look into scheduling apps or get a whiteboard.
 - ii. Figure out a reward system to encourage kids' participation (activity-based, monetary, privileges, etc.).

3. Time Management Techniques:

- a. Time-saving techniques can have a big impact on your schedule.
 - i. Try meal prepping to make the week smooth.
 - ii. Explore habit-stacking to work more efficiently.
 - iii. Lay out clothes for the next day before going to bed each night.

Coping with Change:

1. Embrace Adaptability:

- a. Recognize transitions can be challenging and provide growth and development opportunities. Give yourself grace to feel your feelings.
 - i. Guilt, frustration, irritation, sadness, and more are all common emotions to have during transition.

2. Find the Positive:

- a. Make a list of the benefits of the back to school season.
 - i. Benefits for your children can include their learning experiences and achievements, more socializing with friends and less screen time.
 - ii. Benefits for you can include a more regular schedule or less money spent on childcare.

3. Seek Professional Help:

- a. If stress becomes overwhelming, consider seeking guidance from a mental health professional for additional support.
- b. If you or your child are managing a mental health condition, you may find it helpful to increase the regularity of seeing providers or working closely with providers to plan for this transition.
- c. Access NAMI resources to learn more about finding a therapist:
 - i. [Mental Health Treatment Options*](https://helplinefaqs.nami.org/category/62-mental-health-treatment)
 - ii. [Identity & Cultural Dimensions when Seeking Care**](https://helplinefaqs.nami.org/category/293-identity-cultural-dimensions)
 - iii. [Finding Care for Your Child***](https://helplinefaqs.nami.org/category/5-basic)

Remember, it's okay if you feel mixed emotions around your child's changing schedule. While this may feel like a big change for your child, it's also a big change for you. By implementing these strategies and prioritizing self-care, you can navigate this period with confidence and resilience.

Additional Resources:

- Local parenting support groups
- Employee assistance programs (EAP)
- Reach out to your employer to learn more about this resource.
- [NAMI's Helpline](https://helplinefaqs.nami.org/category/100-namis-helpline)
- [YYA resources for parents](https://helplinefaqs.nami.org/category/100-yya-resources-for-parents)

