



FamilySmart®
Together-Centred®

Parenting

When Going To
School Is Hard

AGES
4-8



Who It's For

This tool was created by families for families and caring adults who care for a child (ages 4 - 8) who struggles with mental health challenges and going to school. We think there's a difference between a child who won't go to school and a child who can't go to school. This tool focuses on the times when a child can't go to school because of their mental health.

Why It's Important

We all want our children to feel good about going to school, but sometimes we don't know how to process what is happening for our child, how to talk about it, or how it's impacting them and us (our family). But it's important to consider all of this. When families receive help to understand and to talk with, and about, their child who is struggling, things have a chance of going better. We offer help to families to make this easier for them.

About This Tool



Children (Ages 4 - 8)

Sometimes our children's mental health gets in their way of going to school. It might feel like we are always trying to convince them that they will feel better when they get to school, or that school will be fun. Maybe it feels like we're always explaining to the school why they won't be there again. The time before they leave for school can bring many tears and lots of anxiety. At this age, it's often hard for our children to tell us what is bothering them. It can be exhausting, confusing, and worrisome for everyone. Talking to our children about their struggles with attending school and getting them help isn't easy. Does this sound familiar?

You're not alone. We know some things that can make it easier.

"Sometimes we don't know how to process what is happening for our child."

You are not alone.



Three Strategies

As parents, helping our children who are struggling is hard and it's also hard to help ourselves when this is happening. This tool focuses on three strategies that can help families to understand, and talk with, and about, their children who are struggling at home and at school:

1. **Perspective: shifting how I see the situation**
2. **Preparing: getting ready to help my child**
3. **Practicing: thinking about what I can say or do**

Be kind to yourself as you move through the strategies. They take practice and you might have to be okay with it when you don't get it right.

What helps one child or family may not necessarily help another, but we hope some of these suggestions will help you and your family to talk with your child and their school.

"What helps one child or family may not necessarily help another."

Be kind to yourself.

Do you wonder where to start so things can go better for your child?



PERSPECTIVE

I consider that my child's behaviour is communication and it's a way for them to tell me that things are hard for them right now.

I consider that school might have to look different for my child right now.

PREPARING

I begin by acknowledging how hard it is for me, my child and our family. And I remind myself to not judge myself, my child and our family. It's just what we are experiencing.

I acknowledge the sadness my child and I might feel when their experience with school is not what we wanted or hoped for.

PRACTICING

I listen to my child and I validate their feelings and my own feelings.

This can Look Like:

I also pay attention to my own needs so I show up well for my child.

This can Sound Like:

"I see this is really hard for you and I know how hard you are trying."

I tell myself, "This is hard, but I don't have to do this alone."

"What do I need to do for myself today, or right now, so I show up the best I can for my child?"

Do you wonder how to start a conversation with your child about school and their mental health?



PERSPECTIVE

I consider that my child isn't *giving* me a hard time; my child is *having* a hard time.

PREPARING

I often remind myself that all kids learn and develop differently, and this takes patience and understanding.

I choose to talk to my child when we are both calm, and I choose to show empathy and kindness to my child the best that I can.

I think of open-ended questions that can help me understand what my child is experiencing.

I pay attention to how stress and other emotions affect the way I show up for my child and others.

PRACTICING

I focus on the relationship with my child so I can better understand their experiences.

This can Look Like:

I listen to what they share about their day, and I acknowledge their experiences.

Without judging, I ask questions to help me understand their experiences.

If I haven't shown up well for my child, I acknowledge this and try talking to them again.

This can Sound Like:

"What was fun today? What was hard? What made you laugh?"

"I'm not happy with how I spoke to you earlier. I'm sorry. Can we try again?"

Do you wonder how to start a conversation with your child's teacher?



PERSPECTIVE

I know that it's okay to learn as I go because this is new to me and I can't be expected to know what to do all the time.

I trust that my child's teacher, my child, and I all have knowledge that can help my child. When we share our thoughts with each other and all work together to find solutions, my child and I will be better supported.

PREPARING

If necessary, I make an appointment to talk to the teacher. I don't have to wait for parent-teacher

conferences, and I don't have to know exactly what to say to the school.

When it's possible for me, I make notes of what my child and our family specifically need from the school and the questions we have.

PRACTICING

I make some clear asks of my child's teacher.

This can Sound Like:

"I want things to go better for my child but I don't know how. Where do I start?"

"Are there any resources available that might help us?"

"What are you noticing about my child when they are at school?"

"What can I do to help us work together for my child?"



FamilySmart[®]
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Toll Free: 1 (855) 887 8004

Email: info@familysmart.ca

Website: familysmart.ca

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