



## Back to School *Without* a Bang

Going back to school after a relaxing summer can be quite a challenge. The transition can be anxiety-provoking enough that it's worth a column to review some basic guidelines.

Summer break usually includes a variety of outdoor experiences that incorporate physical activity. The less structured activities of summer are different from the school environment. Even though the imposed structure of the classroom can be positive, the transition period of getting ready to go back into the classroom can be difficult for students with fragile X syndrome.

Several strategies can help in guiding a successful transition. If the student is going back to the same school with the same teaching staff, the transition process is easier and requires less support. When the student changes schools, neighborhoods, or programs, additional support is required.

### SAY IT WITH PICTURES

Prior to the start of school, take digital pictures of the school, classroom, playground or school ground and school staff. These pictures can then be incorporated into a story about going back to school. The student can either read or be read the story. Repetition of the story can provide familiarity and predictability, making the unknown or novel experience less intimidating. Another option is to make a video of the school facility along with a welcome message from the teaching staff that will support the student. Other staff members working around the school (janitors, school secretaries and cafeteria staff) should also be included. Watching the school video will become a pastime that is both enjoyable and a positive strategy.

### FIND A FRIEND

Whenever possible, it is helpful to find classmates to accompany the student with FXS when going back to school. This buddy can help orient the student with FXS, perhaps


describing what to expect and what might be different in the coming year. The phone or email can be used in the weeks leading up to the first day.

### ESTABLISH A ROUTINE

Walking to school with a friend or sibling, or riding together in a carpool or school bus is helpful. Routine brings predictability, which is self-calming and reassuring. When the early morning routine becomes habituated, entering the classroom and starting the day simply becomes an extension of that process.

### TELL A STORY

If your child is returning to the same school in the fall, social stories can often assist in a less direct way while reducing anxiety about the upcoming school year. The stories can include a theme about how exciting it is to go back to school. They can conclude with a description of the strategies mentioned above, a list of classmates' names, and a biography of the new teacher.

Beginning the year without a "bang" of discomfort can be easier when proactive strategies are employed. It is very important to take time to plan the transition before school starts so that the beginning can set a positive cycle in motion. We know that individuals with FXS habituate routines rather quickly, and find comfort in repetition. Making that routine available before the first day of school will certainly increase the likelihood that the rest of the school year will be positive and productive. Good luck with your transition and may this school year be the best ever. 

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