

Get Ready to Go Back to School
by Paddy Kutz, Executive Director,
Mental Health America of Licking County

It's August and the telltale signs have emerged. "Back to School" specials appear in newspaper ads. Prominent displays of school supplies have popped up everywhere. And many parents start looking downright eager about the end of summer, when they can re-establish a normal routine.

Besides new school outfits and supplies, there are great ways to help your kids start off on the right foot for a successful school year. Steps that parents and guardians take before school starts – and during the first few days – can help smooth the transition back to school. Here are some key tips:

- ◆ Before buying back-to-school clothing, check the school's dress code.
- ◆ If it's a transition year for your child (from elementary to middle, or from middle to high school), or if your child is new to the district or a different school this year, visit the school to familiarize him/her with the building.
- ◆ If your child participates in sports, make sure that he/she has had a recent physical exam, and that the proper forms have been completed and turned in to the school.
- ◆ After the "lazy days" of summer, it's important to re-establish a more structured routine before school starts.
- ◆ The beginning of each school year offers students an opportunity for a fresh start. Sit down with your child and set goals. Discuss the pros and cons of the previous year, and how some things can change for the better.
- ◆ Always encourage your child to do his/her best and to ask for help when they are struggling.

Remember parents and guardians, you have the biggest role to play in your child's success. Be sure to get the child in a going-to-bed-routine now, feed the child high protein and low carbs, decrease television and video games and make sure they get plenty of exercise. Sit down with your child and talk about any fears he or she may have. Let your child know that you love and support them and you expect them to behave and do their very best.

Once the school year has begun, these tips can help your student stay on the right track:

- ◆ Carefully review the important information that is sent home with each child at the start of the school year. Complete and return any forms.

Organize the rest of the material in a special folder that you can keep handy.

- ◆ It's important to update the emergency-contact information for your child and send the form back to the school.
- ◆ Contact the school in writing if your child has special needs or circumstances that teachers should be aware of, such as a need to take medication while at school.
- ◆ Sit down and review the student handbook and rules with your child and share your expectations for their good behavior in the school and at home.
- ◆ Finally, keep on top of their schoolwork daily and again, ask for help if needed.

Children and youth want to be successful in school and we adults must help them. Remember that some kids feel a little scared or nervous at first because of all the new things: new teachers, new friends, and maybe even a new school. Luckily, these worries only stick around for a little while for most people. Have a great year and call Mental Health America at 740-522-1341 or email us at mhalc@alink.org for resources on mental health help. You may also want to check out our website for information on mental health and mental illnesses at www.mhalc.org