

Back-to-School Toolkit

Helping Students Start the School Year with Confidence

School Counselor Resource Series

Purpose

The beginning of a new school year brings excitement, opportunity, and uncertainty. While many students adjust quickly, others may experience anxiety, stress, difficulty with transitions, or concerns about academics, friendships, or new routines.

This toolkit provides practical strategies and conversation starters to help students begin the school year with confidence while supporting their emotional well-being.

Student Transition Checklist

Encourage students to check off what they've already accomplished.

- ☐ I found my classrooms.
- ☐ I introduced myself to someone new.
- ☐ I asked for help when I needed it.
- ☐ I learned my teachers' names.
- ☐ I followed my daily schedule.
- ☐ I completed my assignments.
- ☐ I found a safe adult at school.
- ☐ I practiced a healthy coping skill.
- ☐ I showed kindness to someone.
- ☐ I kept trying, even when something felt difficult.

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1431 Riverside Pkwy, Suite A | Lawrenceville, GA | 30043 | 678-765-9291
www.freedompathcounseling.org | info@freedompathcounseling.org

Quick Student Check-In

Use these questions during the first few weeks of school.

- What has been the best part of the new school year?
- What has been the hardest part?
- How are you feeling about school right now?
- Is there anything you're worried about?
- What is one thing you're looking forward to?
- Who do you feel comfortable talking to at school?
- How can I support you?

Common Transition Challenges

Students may experience:

- ☐ Separation anxiety
- ☐ New friendships
- ☐ Academic pressure
- ☐ Test anxiety
- ☐ Changes in routine
- ☐ Organization challenges
- ☐ Social concerns
- ☐ New teachers
- ☐ Bullying concerns
- ☐ Returning after a difficult summer

Remember that transitions look different for every student.

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Healthy Coping Strategies

Encourage students to:

- Take slow, deep breaths.
- Ask questions when they're unsure.
- Focus on one task at a time.
- Keep a consistent sleep routine.
- Stay connected with supportive adults.
- Practice positive self-talk.
- Take movement breaks when appropriate.
- Remember that adjustment takes time.

Conversation Starters for Families

Share these questions with parents to encourage meaningful conversations at home.

- What made you smile today?
- What challenged you today?
- Did anyone help you today?
- How did you help someone else?
- Is there anything you're nervous about tomorrow?
- What's one thing you're proud of this week?

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Watch for Students Who May Need Extra Support

Some students may need additional encouragement if they are:

- Frequently absent or reluctant to attend school
- Emotionally withdrawn
- Expressing excessive worry
- Having difficulty making friends
- Experiencing significant changes in mood
- Struggling to adjust after a family transition or loss

Early support can make a meaningful difference.

Counselor Planning Checklist

- ☐ Conduct beginning-of-year student check-ins.
- ☐ Meet with new students.
- ☐ Review students with known support plans.
- ☐ Share community mental health resources with families.
- ☐ Connect with teachers regarding students needing additional support.
- ☐ Schedule classroom guidance lessons focused on belonging, emotional wellness, and healthy relationships.

Encouragement for School Counselors

The first few weeks of school often set the tone for the rest of the year. Every welcoming conversation, reassuring smile, and moment of encouragement helps students feel seen, valued, and connected.

Thank you for creating spaces where students can grow with confidence and hope.

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Part of the Freedom Path Counseling School Counselor Resource Series

These resources are provided free of charge to support school counselors as they invest in the emotional well-being of students and families. Learn more and access additional downloadable tools at **freedompathcounseling.org/school-counselor-resource-center**

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