

# suburbanlife

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# COPING WITH BACK-TO-SCHOOL ANXIETY DURING THE PANDEMIC

A new school year provokes anxiety in the best of times. After the last year and a half of the pandemic, with shutdowns, lockdowns, restrictions, and virtual learning, it is not surprising that anxiety levels for students thinking about the new school year have reached an all-time high. Following are several ways to help your student cope with returning to school.

→ **ADDRESS THEIR FEELINGS.** Let them talk about and validate their thoughts and feelings about school, the pandemic, friendships, etc. Remember: Whatever they feel is fair, and they should be able to express those feelings, even if they seem surprising to you. Encouraging a student to talk about their thoughts and feelings can help them to deal with their emotions and feel less anxious.

→ **REASSURE THEM ABOUT THEIR SAFETY.** Remind children that although a COVID-19 infection can be serious, fortunately, for children and much of their family, there is not a high risk of serious infection. If a young, healthy person gets COVID-19, it is usually a brief, relatively mild illness. Address ways that you and your family are protecting older or more vulnerable people in your family. Reassure them that with the vaccine in place, many vulnerable people have been able to limit their chance of serious infection with the vaccine.



Physician photography courtesy of PCG

→ **TEACH THEM THE BASICS ABOUT HYGIENE.** Regardless of whether your student will be wearing a mask in school or not, having them learn and practice basic illness prevention can help prevent all illnesses. This is a skill that can be a lifelong healthy practice. Teach them to cover their mouths when they cough, and to wash hands before eating, after playing, and after coughing, sneezing, or blowing their noses. Teach them how to wash well with soap and water or hand sanitizer. Teach them to wash or use hand sanitizer before and after touching

their eyes, nose, or mouth, and to avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth when not necessary. Teach them to avoid sharing drinks or anything that has another's saliva on it, such as a lollipop. Also, teach them to avoid contact with others' saliva when hugging and kissing family or other loved ones.

→ **MAINTAIN HEALTH.** Teach your children the importance of healthy habits when it comes to avoiding COVID-19 and other illnesses. Eating healthy, drinking water, getting daily exercise, and getting

enough sleep are crucial to keeping one's immune system strong. Empower your children to have healthy habits, which enable the body to fight infections and even help prevent them. This will help keep them healthy and empower them to take active measures to maintain their health.

→ **KEEP VACCINES UP TO DATE.** This is more important than ever. Consider the COVID-19 vaccine for you and your family. This is an excellent way to keep you and your family safe from the virus.

→ **FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH YOUR SCHOOL RULES FOR THIS YEAR.** Update your child so they know what to expect regarding masks, distancing, lunches, activities, etc.

→ **ESTABLISH A ROUTINE AND TALK ABOUT SCHOOL.** Remind your child about the fun aspects of school, such as seeing friends and participating in sports and other fun and exciting activities. When they have negative thoughts or emotions about school, validate those feelings and then remind them about the positive aspects of returning to school—namely, friends, teachers, classes they may enjoy, afterschool activities, etc. Go over the basics with them to help build their confidence, such as their morning schedule, what they will eat for lunch and snacks, what school bag or school supplies they are going to use, what they will wear, how they will get to school, etc. Creating an a.m. checklist can help to decrease anxiety on the first days and weeks of school as well. ■



Dr. Marie Carrier Kinsley

## About Dr. Kinsley

Marie Carrier Kinsley, M.D., FAAP, is the co-founder of Pediatric Care Group, P.C. (PCG), a leading pediatric practice with offices in Jenkintown and Richboro. At both locations, patients and their parents benefit from a team of practitioners who strive to deliver the highest-quality pediatric care in an environment of compassion and support.

PCG follows the “medical home” model, meaning it is patient-centered, comprehensive, team-based, coordinated, accessible, and focused on quality and safety. Children are well cared for, medically, developmentally, and emotionally. PCG has the resources required to treat every child, regardless of family income or their mental or physical abilities. It also accepts most major insurances for optimal patient convenience.

Dr. Kinsley co-founded the practice in 2003 with Marylee Mundell, D.O., FAAP. PCG has continued to grow in the years since its founding, serving families in Philadelphia, Bucks and Montgomery counties, as well as the surrounding areas. A team that includes four pediatricians and three nurse practitioners provide care for patients from birth to age 21, with convenient hours on weekdays and Saturday, including a walk-in hour, from 8 a.m. to 9 a.m., Monday through Thursday. PCG is a vaccine center with immediate availability of the Pfizer vaccine for eligible patients.



Dr. Marylee Mundell

Visit [www.pcgkids.com](http://www.pcgkids.com) for hours or call (215) 885-8700 to book an initial consultation.



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