

MEDIA RELEASE

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Education experts' tips for safe and successful school year

Australian Catholic University education experts have united to provide practical tips and advice to support students, parents, and educators in time for the start of the 2025 school year.

For those starting kindergarten or primary school, early years education expert Dr Victoria Minson said it was an important milestone and an opportune time to create a positive start to a child's formal education.

"In the days leading up to school or kindergarten, talk about it in a positive way. It's so important to set the tone from the outset of education being an exciting, valuable, and fun lifelong experience," Dr Minson said.

"Use fun everyday moments to build familiarity with the school context, such as packing and using lunch or snack boxes, wearing new shoes or clothing, asking for help, packing away belongings and setting up sleep and wellbeing routines to help your little one have the energy and ability to deal with their newfound independence."

At the other end of the school journey, standardised assessment expert Associate Professor Steven Lewis called on those in their senior years of secondary school to pace themselves and set up healthy habits from the get-go.

"The senior years of secondary school are important, but it is equally important to balance your studies with activities that help sustain your mental and physical health and wellbeing. Work out a schedule that allows time for study, rest and the things that you enjoy, such as playing sport or socialising with friends," he said.

"It's also worth remembering that while you might have a career goal in mind for life after school, there are always many pathways to get there, and they don't all hinge entirely on your ATAR."

For families of students with additional needs, inclusive education expert Dr Matthew White said while it could be a stressful time, it was important to open dialogue with schools early on.

"Before engaging the school, reflect on the achievements of the previous year and consider what goals you wish your child to achieve over the course of the year. Consider the reasonable adjustments the teachers might make for your child to achieve those goals," Dr White said.

And for families with children reluctant to return to school, Dr White said it was important to start conversations early about their concerns, re-establish bedtime routines, and consider supports they may need.

When it comes to children's wellbeing, ACU Institute of Child Protection Studies Director Professor Daryl Higgins said parents and guardians should ask schools about how they keep children safe.

"Ask about their safeguarding policy – where is it, what does it cover, what types of issues have come up, and how have they addressed them at the school in the past," he said.

Professor Higgins called on families to talk to their children in the lead up to starting or returning to school about issues including body privacy, respecting others, appropriate

behaviours of and towards others and the importance of disclosing anything they feel uncomfortable about.

The health of educators is also important to cope with the demands of the school year. Teacher mental health wellbeing expert Dr Debra Phillips appealed to educators busily preparing for the school year ahead to create a mental health care action plan for themselves.

“The plan is like being prepared to put your own oxygen mask on when the inevitable turbulence hits so you can be in a ready state before you can attend to students – after all, to teach well is to be well,” she said.

Dr Phillips said regular exercise, debriefing with colleagues, taking time out rather than working through recess and lunchtime, eating nutritious food, keeping hydrated, restricting screen time and work in the evenings, taking part in creative activities and keeping focused on the big picture were ways to cope with challenges.

“It is important to remember why we still teach because a sense of purpose gives meaning to life and offers the protective stamina to navigate through difficult situations,” she said.

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