A GUIDE FROM THE PRACTICE OF SHARIFUL A. SYED, MD

The transition years: getting ready for 3rd, 6th and 9th grade

Dr. Syed sees the same pattern again and again. Third, sixth and ninth grade are "the years where the academic load of school goes up a notch": more homework, more tests, and often a new building, changing classes, labs and group projects where kids have to plan and talk together. A move, a divorce or a loss in the family hits the same way. A child who did fine last year can struggle, and that doesn't mean anyone failed.

If anyone may be in danger, call 911. For the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, call or text 988.

Before the new year

- Visit the new building before the first day. Walk the halls, and find the bathroom, the lunchroom and the next classroom.
- Find one adult your child can go to when it's too much: a teacher, a counselor or an aide.
- Look at the new schedule together. Practice the parts that change, like switching rooms or opening a locker.
- Ask how group work and labs will run, and whether your child can have a set job in the group.
- If your child has an IEP or a 504 plan, check that it has been updated for the new grade.

The first weeks

- Keep home calm and predictable: the same after-school routine and the same bedtime.
- Expect more tiredness and more meltdowns at home at first. It's a lot to take in.
- Listen first. Ask what was hardest today, and say back what you heard before you give advice.
- If you need to push, understand first: "That sounds really hard. Let's figure out how to try again tomorrow." A push without that can feel like nobody cares how hard it was.

The two-month rule

- Give a new start about two months.
- If your child still isn't settling in by then, and you see other changes too, that's the moment to get a consultation.
- Changes to watch: homework not getting done, grades dropping, not wanting to go out, dropping the things they used to enjoy.

When to call a doctor

- It's been about two months and your child still isn't settling in.
- Grades are dropping, homework isn't getting done, or your child refuses to go to school.
- Your child has stopped doing things they used to enjoy, or pulled away from friends.
- Your child talks about feeling hopeless or not wanting to be here: call or text 988 now.

Talk with Dr. Syed for 30 minutes, free, by video or phone: **(516) 522-0410** or sharifulsyedmd.com/autism.

General education for families, not medical or legal advice and not a diagnosis. Every child is different; talk with your child's doctor about yours.