

# BACK TO SCHOOL

*helping kids thrive*

Strategies & Tips for Returning to  
School & Secure Attachment Tools



name

Cornerstone Christian Counseling

year

2025-2026 Academic Year



**CORNERSTONE**  
CHRISTIAN COUNSELING

# Inside this GUIDE

The start of a new school year is full of possibility—and often, a fair amount of stress for both kids and parents. Children are navigating new classrooms, friendships, expectations, and challenges, all while growing emotionally, spiritually, and academically. Parents are walking alongside them, often wondering, how can I support my child during all these changes?

here's what we cover...



Co-regulation & Secure Attachment tools



Developmental Stages Snapshot



Navigating Technology



Resources

This guide is designed to give you a whole-child perspective as you prepare for the year ahead. You'll find insights from child development, neuroscience, and faith to help you recognize what's normal at different ages, how stress may show up, and what you can do to support your child's growth.



# SECURE ATTACHMENT

## tools & tips



### Focus on Co-Regulation & Create Routine Around It

Parents and caregivers are the primary “external regulator(s)” for a child’s developing nervous system. What does this mean? Prioritize **YOUR** regulation, and model that with your kiddos. What do **YOU** do when you feel frustrated, angry, sad? Do you go for a walk, take a deep breath, turn on some music? Showing them can be more powerful than telling them – that is what modeling is all about.

### Rituals of Connection

In the rush of school, sports, and busy schedules, kids grow in their secure attachment when they can expect and trust steady moments of connection to look forward to. These rituals don’t have to be big or complicated—just consistent, playful, and meaningful. They communicate, “I’m seen, I’m safe, and I belong.”

### Transitional Objects

This can be especially helpful for those younger kiddos with separation anxiety, something to say to them “my love is with you even when I’m not there.”

### Anchor with Faith Practices

Continually remind your child (and yourself) that our deepest source of comfort, strength, wisdom, and joy is found in Jesus. Building simple, consistent faith practices—like prayer, scripture, or worship—gives kids a steady anchor they can return to no matter what the school day brings.

MINDFULNESS: Check-ins throughout the day using:

- Emotions chart on the kitchen fridge at breakfast and dinner
- Emotion cards in the car on the go, to and from school/activities
- An app that can be shared with the whole family (for those high-tech teens)

highlight = clickable link!



- ☒ Morning blessing
- ☒ Daily “mantra” before the bus
- ☐ After school snack & check-in
- ☐ Bedtime “high, low, buffalo”
- ☐ Weekly one-on-one dates

- A note in their lunchbox or hidden in their pocket
- Lend a bracelet or a necklace to your little to wear throughout the day
- Draw a heart or write a note on their arm or wrist



Memorize short Bible Verses as a family each week  
\*tip if reading age, write the verse on your kids bathroom mirrors!

Nehemiah 8:10: “The joy of the Lord is your strength  
Matthew 28:20: “...I am with you always, to the end of the age”  
Psalms 46:1: “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble”  
Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through him who strengthens me”

#### Breath Prayers

Breathe in peace (inhale), Breathe out worry (exhale)







God gives me strength (inhale), I can be strong (exhale)

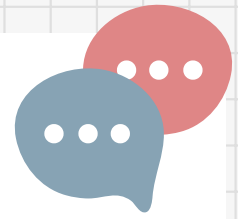
I am kind (inhale), I am strong (exhale)

# DEVELOPMENTAL

## stages snapshot



	Regulation Capacity	Developmental Notes	Behavior Under Stress	Tips for Co-Regulation
 <b>Toddlers (1-3)</b>	Emerging awareness of emotions; highly dependent on adults for regulation	Limbic system active; prefrontal cortex immature (reasoning, logic)	Tantrums, frustration, meltdowns	Caregiver modeling, "name it to tame it" (name the emotion being displayed)
 <b>Preschool (3-5)</b>	Beginning basic regulation strategies; success depends on adult scaffolding (can't regulate on their own so modeling is key)	Prefrontal cortex slowly developing; short attention span	Emotional outbursts when tired, hungry, overstimulated, lack of control, fear of unknown	Deep breaths, counting, feeling words; adult-guided labeling; predictability and routines, warning before transitions & over-communicate plans
 <b>Early Elementary (6-8)</b>	Can pause and use simple coping strategies with reminders & help	Developing reflective capacity; still borrows adult calm	Irritability, withdrawal, frustration with failure or challenging tasks	Breathing, sensory tools, "taking a break"; discuss emotions ("I was mad because..."); model regulation, teach tool "wizard/lizard brain", reminders and warnings before transitions
 <b>Late Elementary (9-11)</b>	Increasing self-reflection and independent coping; still inconsistent	Integration of cognitive and emotional brain areas	Peer-triggered anxiety, perfectionism, irritability	Journaling, movement, prayer, distraction; teach emotional literacy and flexible thinking; anticipate triggers
 <b>Adolescence (12-14)</b>	Abstract strategies understood but often forgotten in the moment	Hormonal surges, brain pruning; prefrontal cortex still maturing	Mood swings, peer-influenced behaviors, forgets coping strategies	Mindfulness, reframing, co-regulation; provide structure while allowing independence, collaborate, stay curious
 <b>Teen Years (15-18)</b>	More advanced coping; planning and impulse control improving	Prefrontal cortex continues to mature = more consistent planning and impulse control	Milestones vary by temperament, trauma, attachment. Decisions often peer-influenced	Consistent co-regulation; provide predictable routines; validate feelings, support skill-building & growing autonomy, stay curious



# TECHNOLOGY

## *suggestions*

1

### Age and Developmental Windows Matter

**Ages 0-8:** focus on hands-on play, face-to-face connection, and real-world learning over screens.

**Ages 9-12:** introduce short, purposeful uses (creative apps, family calls, educational shows, learning tools) with guided support.

**Ages 13-18:** Move from strict control to ongoing conversation, coaching teens in discernment and wisdom online. Ask questions and scaffold involvement with devices as teens show growth and discernment. Use additional caution (or if possible prohibit) risky social media apps such as Snapchat and apps that use AI bots until later teen years.

2

### Stay Curious & Collaborate

Create a collaborative process with kids in setting limits, having them decide what time limits and apps would be good for them, discussing pros and cons, risks and rewards of the decisions. As parents, still set firm boundaries, but give teens the opportunity to discuss and discern first. Ask open-ended questions: "What do you like about that app/game/video?" instead of only monitoring from a distance. Curiosity builds trust and keeps the door open for harder conversations later.

3

### Build Body-Brain Awareness Around Devices

Teach kids to check in with their bodies after using devices, "How does my body feel after I used this app/game/video?" Pair with regulation skills like going outside, movement and prayer pauses.

4

### Practical Anchors & Rhythms

- Charging stations outside bedrooms
- "Tech-free zones" (kitchen table, car rides, bedrooms)
- Family digital covenant: created together and framed as a shared commitment, not a rule list
- "Tech fasts" - one day of the week, a few hours every day etc.



# RESOURCES

*for common challenges*

## Supporting Your Child in their Development (Ages 0-18)

- The Whole Brain Child, Dan Siegel and Tina Bryson
- The Power of Showing Up, Dan Siegel and Tina Bryson

## Discipline & Co-regulation:

- No Drama Discipline, Dan Siegel and Tina Bryson
- Teaching Kids Interoceptive Awareness (3 minute video)
- Understanding the Zones of Regulation & Co regulating:  
Handout by the SPT Institute (helpful for kiddos ages 1-8)

What to Do When You Dread Your Bed (Workbook) Ages 6-9

What to Do When You Don't Want to Be Apart (Workbook) Ages 7-11

## Pornography

- Good Pictures Bad Pictures: Porn-Proofing Today's Young Kids
- Good Pictures Bad Pictures Jr.
- Defend Young Minds

## Grief

- The Memory Box: A Book About Grief By Joanna Rowland
- The Invisible String by Patrice Karst

## Technology & Children

- AAP recommendations (American Academy of Pediatrics)
- Tech-Wise Family by Andy Crouch
- The Anxious Generation by Jonathan Haidt
- Barna Research on kids & digital faith
- Axis - Biblical Teen Parenting Resources

Content from this booklet was largely adapted from Lisa Dion and the Synergetic Play Therapy Institute, Dan Siegel's work found in The Whole Brain Child and No Drama Discipline



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