

stop asking **“HOW WAS YOUR DAY?”**



**a survival guide for
parents navigating
back to school**

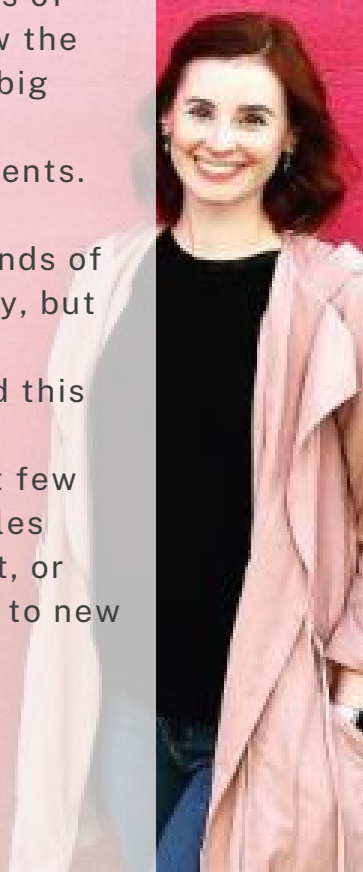
BY: AMANDA GEORGE, LPC

riverside therapist for children, teens, & adults

HI, I'M AMANDA!

As both a licensed professional counselor at Riverside Counseling and a former school counselor with over 20 years of experience, I've seen firsthand how the back-to-school season can stir up big emotions for kids — and how overwhelming that can feel for parents. The shift from the relaxed pace of summer to the structure and demands of the school year is exciting for many, but it can also bring stress, worry, and emotional ups and downs. I created this resource to offer gentle, practical guidance for navigating those first few weeks — whether your child struggles with anxiety, finds change difficult, or just needs extra support adjusting to new routines.

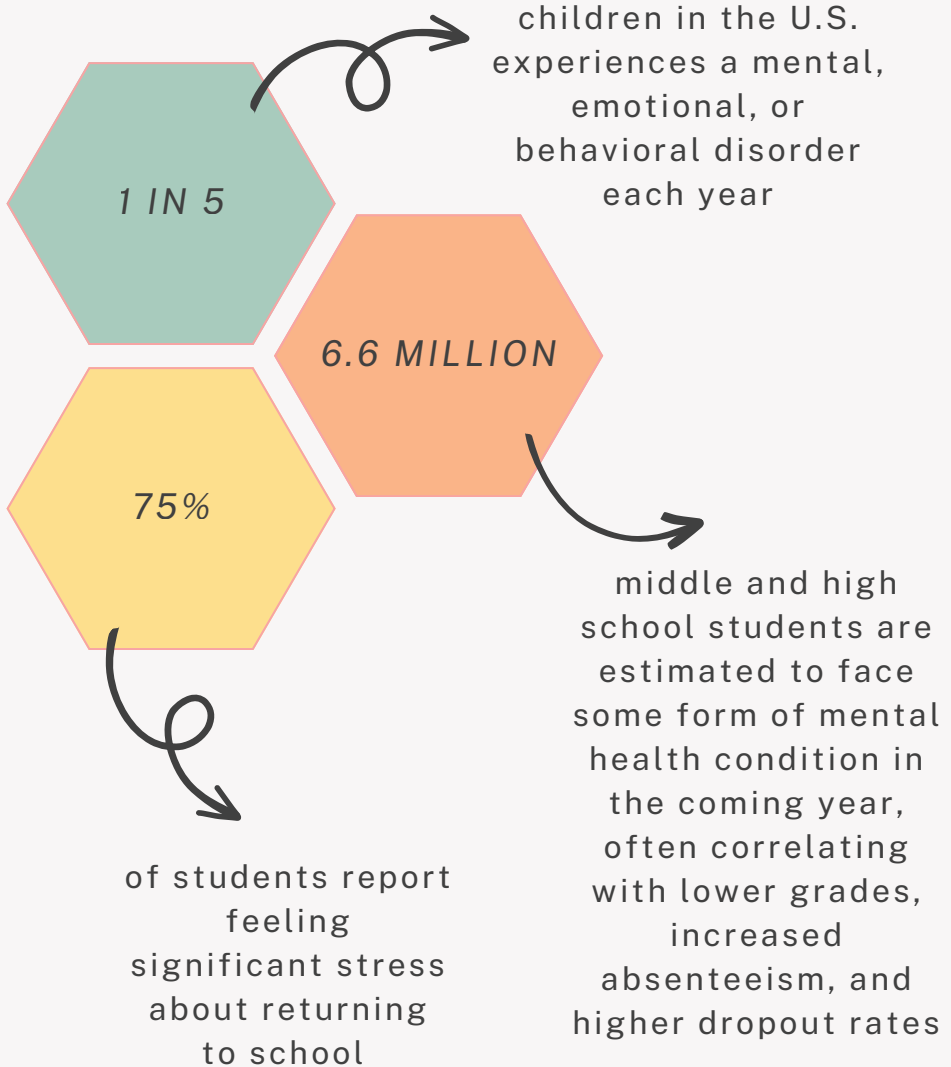
Amanda George



TRANSITION TURBULENCE

The back-to-school season often brings a mix of excitement and anticipation—reconnecting with friends, diving into extracurricular activities, and enjoying the shift to cooler weather. As the days pass, routines begin to take shape, and the familiar rhythm of the school year settles in. Yet for many students—and adults—the transition can feel overwhelming. Shifting from a relaxed, low-demand summer to the structured and often fast-paced environment of the school week can be a significant adjustment, both mentally and emotionally. Here are some ways to tackle transition turbulence.

WHY THIS MATTERS.





1. Normalize discomfort that often accompanies transitions

Feelings of frustration, tearfulness, irritability, and being overwhelmed are natural responses to major shifts in routine and environment. During those first few weeks, your student may simply need a safe harbor amid the storm—someone who listens without judgment and offers empathy. Focus on listening not fixing. Be that steady presence. This too shall pass!

A thin red line forms several large, flowing loops and swirls that frame the text on the page.

2. Encourage decompression time

During those first few weeks, it can be helpful to intentionally schedule more downtime on school days. This might mean scaling back after-school commitments, postponing social plans, or easing up on household expectations. Giving the body and mind space to adjust can make a big difference—most students begin to settle into the new rhythm within two weeks.

A decorative graphic consisting of several thin, red, swirling lines that loop and curve across the top and middle of the page, framing the title and text.

3. Take time before making decisions

It's natural for parents to want to step in and help when their child is visibly distressed. However, the heightened emotions that often surface during the first few weeks of school are frequently intensified by the cognitive and physical demands of adjusting to a new routine. If your school system and extracurriculars allow, consider holding off on making major changes to class schedules or enrollments during the first two to three weeks. Give your student time to settle in—once the dust has settled, revisit the conversation and see if they still feel the same.

A decorative graphic consisting of several thin, red, swirling lines that loop and curve across the page, primarily on the left and right sides, framing the central text.

4. Ask open-ended questions

Those familiar responses like “it was fine” or “nothing” when you ask about your student’s day can be robotic responses! To get a better sense of how they’re really adjusting (and how school is going overall), try asking open-ended questions that invite more thoughtful answers. Asking questions that cannot be answered with a “yes” or “no” or one word is the goal. Check on some examples on the following pages!

open-ended questions

FOR PARENTS

Q1

What feels most comfortable about your class/classes so far?

Q2

What is something that has already surprised you this year?

Q3

What has been easier than expected?

Q4

Which subjects feel the rustiest after the break?

open-ended questions

FOR PARENTS

Q5

Which of your teachers has the biggest personality, and what are they like?

Q6

What is something you will get to do in this grade level that you have not done before?

Q7

What's something you felt worried about before the year started that now feels easy?

Q8

What did it feel like when you saw your friends you didn't see over summer for the first time?

open-ended questions

FOR PARENTS

Q9

If you could magically change one thing about this year, what would it be and why?

Q10

What time of day do you have the most energy and what time of your day do you feel most tired?

Q11

How are you feeling about your schedule – too busy, just right, or not busy enough?

Q12

What do you think is the hardest part of being a student in (elementary, middle, or high)?

open-ended questions

FOR PARENTS

Q13

If you were principal for the day, what would you change about your school?

Q14

What's something you feel like the adults around you don't understand about students' experiences or perspectives?

Q15

What is the most important thing you've learned that doesn't have to do with subjects in school?

THANK YOU FOR READING!

I hope these ideas remind you that even small shifts can make a big difference for kids navigating the ups and downs of the back-to-school transition. Whether it's a quiet moment after school, a weekly check-in, or a simple routine at home, every step you take helps your child feel more grounded and confident. You know your child best — and your care, patience, and consistency are already paving the way for a smoother, stronger school year ahead.

Amanda



I'M HERE TO HELP

Supporting children with anxiety is not easy — but you're not alone. With the right tools and support, healing can happen, and brighter days are ahead. You're doing an incredible job.



STEP 1

Schedule an appointment



STEP 2

Work with Amanda on managing emotions



STEP 3

Experience Healing at Home

**SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT
WITH ME TODAY**

703-724-0200



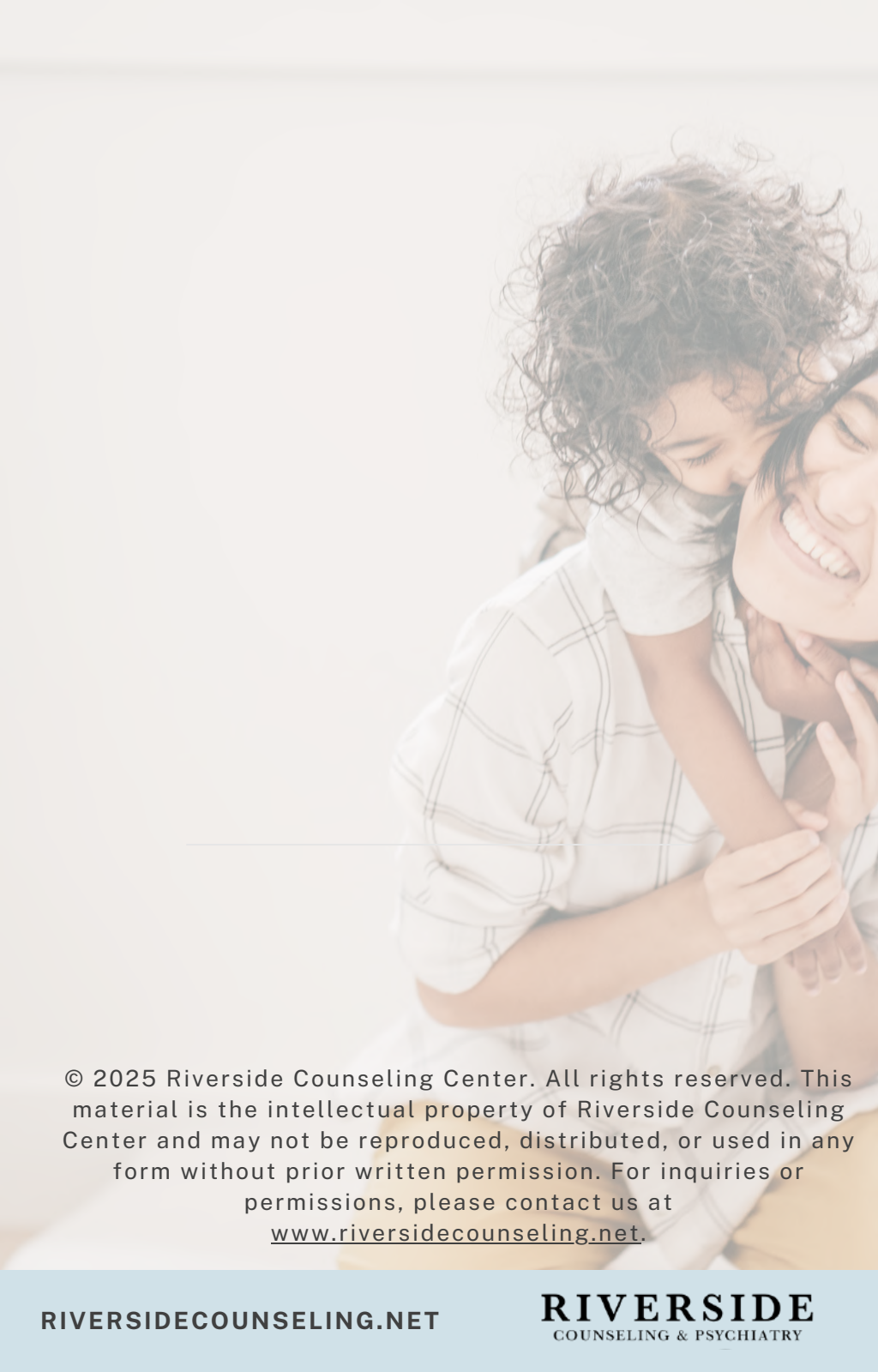


HERE FOR YOU

“Working with Amanda has been a game-changer for our family. She helped my daughter feel understood and gave us tools we still use every day. I finally feel like I know how to support her, and we’ve seen so much growth. I’m so grateful for Amanda’s guidance and care.”

— EM, mom of a 9-year-old





© 2025 Riverside Counseling Center. All rights reserved. This material is the intellectual property of Riverside Counseling Center and may not be reproduced, distributed, or used in any form without prior written permission. For inquiries or permissions, please contact us at www.riversidecounseling.net.