



Back to School in 2021

By Learn to Live

The possible return of in-person learning this fall has many people feeling hopeful. We crave the structure of school days and the return of our favorite teams to the field. Still, for some the idea of sending their kids back to a physical school provokes fear and anxiety.

- I'm sure my child fell behind last year. How will they catch up?
- She hasn't seen her friends in forever. She's not going to fit in.
- How will they know what to do and what to expect? (masks, distancing, new rules, etc.)

Our anxiety is often the result of the way we think about school and the pandemic. Life is full of situations that we can do nothing about, or at least it seems like we often have little control. We end up focused on our emotions, but we rarely consider the thoughts that lead to our emotions. These thoughts often go unnoticed, but they influence our emotions in important ways. Unchallenged, they can become thinking patterns that trap us in negative emotions. We call them Automatic Negative Thinking Traps (ANTs).

Here are just three of the more common ANTs:

- **Fortune Telling** decides that a certain outcome is sure to happen, even if I can't really be sure: "This will affect his GPA so he won't get into the right university, which means he won't get a good job after graduation."
- **Disaster Making** is predicting the worst, something so awful that I simply couldn't handle it: "My kid won't just find schools awkward, she's going to be rejected by her friends."
- **All-or-Nothing Thinking** sees the world in black and white. If things aren't perfect, they're terrible. "I can't believe they're not back full time. The schools are setting these kids up to utterly fail as adults!"

Identifying negative thoughts like these is a good start toward reducing our anxiety as back-to-school starts. The pandemic is already difficult enough. We don't need unhelpful thoughts to make it worse.

Take our confidential assessment to see whether you might benefit from the tools available in our self-paced CBT programs for Stress, Anxiety & Worry, Depression, Social Anxiety, Substance Use, or Insomnia. Visit learntolive.com/partners and use the code **MIIA** to get started.

The Learn to Live programs are available **at no cost** all year long to you or any of your family members (13 and older) experiencing signs of anxiety, worry, low mood, or inability to sleep. If you're already a member, simply sign-in with your username and password. Family members can easily create their own account using the same code.

