

Parent Mentors help their kids cope with the challenges of school



Two parent mentors, Jackie McNair, Gwinnett County, and Wausheka McClary, Elbert County, share their experiences as they deal with independence, anxiety and a tendency to lose focus.

Jackie McNair -- Gwinnett County Parent Mentor

An Independent Spirit, and Anxiety

Although Jackie McNair's 15-year-old daughter, Kendra has Autism, is nonverbal and developmentally delayed, she is a very independent young lady and does not like a lot of help. Her teachers report that she is well behaved and cooperative at school.

In the week prior to the start of the new school year, Kendra displayed lots of anxiety, even at times pushing her mom away. Jackie realized that she might be offering too much assistance. Her new strategy is to wake Kendra up at least 15 minutes earlier for school and to give her time and space to get ready. Rather than standing in her room and prompting her, Jackie lets her dress alone and only offers assistance if she asks for it or is unable to complete her tasks in a timely manner.

In the weeks since school started, Kendra's anxiety continued to increase, at home and at school. It was causing her to be unable to complete any tasks and prompting her only lead to her displaying more aggressive behaviors, sometimes crying.



Jackie says, "My usually calm demeanor was wearing thin and I was beginning to feel overwhelmed, helpless to help my daughter.

I took her to a neurologist. He prescribed medication for the anxiety, starting with a very low dosage."

"After 5 days, Kendra was a different person. She is smiling; completing tasks without prompting, and seems to be feeling a lot better. Her father and I never dreamed of putting her on any type of medication, but now I wish we had considered it sooner."

Jackie says that it has taken a long time to find a doctor who listened and seemed knowledgeable

about children like Kendra. “He spent so much time observing her and asking questions, before deciding to write a prescription. We are beginning to see the girl we always knew was inside of Kendra.”

Contact Jackie McNair

Wausheka McClary -- Elbert County Parent Mentor

Creating the Classroom Environment at Home

Wausheka McClary’s 10-year-old son, Kameron is very social and as a result tends to get off track easily from the things he needs to do. Although getting him school-ready is an easy task, Wausheka admitted that it could be very time consuming.

Wausheka says, “We spend time with him the week before school starts asking him questions and guiding him with answers to help him with problem solving and analytical thinking. Our goal is to help him get back in the right frame of mind for being in a classroom. We have found over the years that it has helped him with the transition from home back to school if we create the “classroom environment” at home.

We also have to remind him that the beginning of a new year is just that.

Kameron has a tendency to compare last year's teacher with this year's teacher when it comes to classroom management. To help in this area we constantly remind him that he is another year older and therefore he should be doing some things better or differently to help illustrate that the new teacher does things differently because he is on a higher level grade wise.

We spend time talking to him about what to expect as he enters the next grade. We also talk to him about the responsibilities that are added as he enters the next grade.”

Contact Wausheka McClary