

# Children facing increased difficulties returning to in-person school, according to child study expert

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Although research data on the current school year is incomplete, a Virginia Tech child psychologist points to significant increases in

anxiety, depression, irritability and aggression in children.

"We have definitely seen a huge increase in referrals for assessments for academic and social-emotional concerns in [children](#) and adolescents in our community," said Rosanna Breaux, assistant professor of Psychology and director of the Child Study Center at Virginia Tech. "This reflects research suggesting that about a third of children have worse emotional health during the pandemic and articles suggesting increased rates of disruptive behavior and anxiety since the start of school in fall 2021."

Studies indicate that 140,000 U.S. children and adolescents have lost a parent or grandparent caregiver during the pandemic. Many are experiencing grief in addition to the chronic stressor of the pandemic.

"Data suggest that around 20 percent of youth are experiencing moderate to clinical levels of psychological trauma symptoms," said Breaux. "Such trauma and [chronic stress](#) is linked to a range of negative mental health outcomes spanning anxiety to withdrawal to aggression."

Despite these difficulties being reported, there isn't peer reviewed research studies out yet to support these difficulties or experiences this [school](#) year. Professor Breaux anticipates data in the coming months that should provide schools and families with insight into how best to intervene.

Until that time, Breaux encourages families to help meet their children where they are at.

"We should not be focused on where they should be for their [grade level](#), but instead recognize that they have missed something and as a family work together—ideally with their teachers—to help support them in learning what they missed due to the gaps and disruptions in their schooling from the prior year and a half."

Provided by Virginia Tech

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