

# Mom needs help with panic attacks

Dear Dr. Brothers: It seems like just yesterday that I was driving around town, looking at various nursery-school locations and wondering how I could leave my daughter two or three miles from home for three hours!

Somehow I did it, and suddenly she is a junior in college and facing a semester abroad in Europe.

I am still filled with separation anxiety (I know it's sick) and am on the verge of panic. I don't want to make her stay home; she's excited about the opportunity. Can you help me cope with this? — A.K.

**Dear A.K.:** It is interesting that you can trace the separation anxiety you are feeling all the way back to when your child was in nursery school and those three miles and three hours must have seemed like a terrible chasm. It is much more usual, as you know, for the toddler or preschooler to be the one who is unwilling or unable to make that first break away from Mommy for the morning.

You don't say how your anxiety affected your daughter, but since she is excited about going abroad for her junior semester in college, at some point she might have decided to be "unlike Mom" when it comes to separation issues.

Your issues didn't result in your child becoming a clingy, phobic individual.

Now would be a good time to banish the separation anxiety on your part, once and for all. You've held on to it for quite a few years, and it seems as though your child has weathered the storm of becoming a separate individual without anything terrible happening.

You did your job well, and now you can try to relax and let your daughter enjoy being an adult. She will probably be closer to you when your panic mode is banished. There are cell-phone plans for Europe; you can still keep in touch. Good luck.

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Dear Dr. Brothers: I am writing about my son. He's a bright boy, very popular and has always done pretty well in school. He picked a college where he knew he would



**Dr. Joyce Brothers**

● Ask

Dr. Brothers

succeed if he kept his nose to the grindstone, and freshman year he did just fine. But this year he is just not the same person. Everything seems to bore him.

Could this college be wrong for him, or is there anything we can do from home to motivate him? — B.H.

**Dear B.H.:** There is a slight chance that this year your son has figured out that his college pick was a little off-base. Last year his main goals were to fit in, to work hard and to make sure that he succeeded, because failure was just not an option. He accomplished all that.

Now, he has returned to find that he can come up for breath and look around — and it's possible he isn't comfortable with what he is seeing.

He also might have figured out just how much effort he needs to put in to succeed at his college, and his motivation level might have peaked when he was still dreading not being able to measure up. The sophomore year is notorious for inducing the famous "sophomore slump," so your child is not alone.

In fact, your sophomore is actually showing some signs of maturity by not just plowing ahead. Now that the first year of college is over, he might be thinking about his future for the first time, and that can be a daunting adventure.

You can encourage him to remember his responsibilities at school — such as going to classes, studying, etc. — but a little of that goes a long way. He has that part figured out. What would be most helpful now would be to make sure he likes where he is going, or he will need you behind him to make some changes. Be supportive and keep an open mind.

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# Children gain weight during summer time

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — The nation's schools — under fire for unhealthy school lunches, well-stocked vending machines and phys ed cuts — may actually do a better job than parents in keeping children fit and trim.

A study found that 5- and 6-year-olds gained more weight over the summer than during the school year, casting doubt on the assumption that kids are more active during summer vacation.

The findings don't reveal what's behind the out-of-school weight gain, but the researchers speculate it's because the summer months lack the structure of the school year with all its activities and daily comings and goings.

Doug Downey, an Ohio State University sociologist who co-authored the study, said that for many youngsters, the lazy days of summer may offer plenty of free time to eat snacks and lounge about watching TV or playing video games.

He said the study seems to point to the need for parents to be more involved, as well as raising the idea of a longer school year and more after-school programs to keep children active.

And schools should continue their efforts to promote good health, he said.

"Trying to improve the quality of school lunches, getting the soda machines out of schools — those are still good approaches. But clearly the source of children's obesity problems lie outside of the school," Downey said.

For the study, Indiana University and Ohio State researchers studied the growth rates of the body-mass indexes of 5,380 kindergartners and first-graders. The data came from a National Center for Education Statistics survey that ran from fall 1998 to spring 2000 in 310 schools across the country.

The university sociologists discovered that the youngsters' BMIs increased on average more than twice as much during summer break compared with the school year.

That increase was even greater among black and Hispanic students

and kids who were overweight at the start of kindergarten.

Once kids were back in school, however, the monthly growth rate of their BMIs fell, and the growth rate gap between the overall population and the minority and overweight groups shrank, the researchers found.

The study will appear in the April issue of the American Journal of Public Health.

Betsy A. Keller, a professor of exercise and sport sciences at Ithaca College in New York, said the pattern seen in the study's snapshot of the kids' kindergarten year, summer break, and first grade is "irregular" and does not mesh with kids' normal growth in height and weight.

Keller said it clearly points to a summer gain in fat mass, although she said data from later school years is needed to see if that trend continues.

Overall, she said the findings point to the need for parents to become actively involved in encouraging their kids to develop healthy habits even as the push continues for schools to focus more on those same goals.

"The big question in my mind is what are the parents doing with these kids during the summer?"

Unless they're paying attention to their child's level of activity and diet, with each passing summer they're just adding to the risk of them becoming overweight," she said.

"These are 5- and 6-year-olds, after all.

"So they're not going to the grocery store — it's their parents who are making these choices."

The study's co-author, Brian Powell, a professor of sociology at Indiana University, said earlier studies have indicated that 5- and 6-year-olds with above average BMI and BMI gains are at increased risk for adult obesity.

Some 17 percent of U.S. youngsters already are obese, and millions more are overweight.

Obese adults are at heightened risk of developing diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and other disorders.