

School Transition

TIPS FOR PARENTS

Is your child entering a new elementary school this fall? Starting kindergarten, middle school, or high school? During transitions, children often need a little extra time, attention and support from their parents. School transitions also signal a new stage of family life for everyone.

Children may feel...

- Sadness at the loss of the old school, friends, neighborhood (and if a preschooler or kindergartner, separation from parents)
- Anxiety about the unknown
- Fear of not making friends, being accepted
- Apprehension about their ability to do the work or master the logistics involved (getting lost or on the wrong bus, being able to open the locker, getting lunch, learning the rules, finding the bathrooms, managing to change classes during the allotted time, etc.)

Parents may feel...

- Sadness about their child growing up and moving on to the next stage
- Anxiety about whether the new school and/or teacher is the best for their child
- Uncertainty about what their own role should be in the new setting and how the new school views parental involvement (especially when a child moves up to middle or high school)
- Awareness that their child's growing up is linked to a new stage of life for parents, too, and that family life will change

For a smooth transition ~

Prepare:

- If the school has scheduled an open house, orientation, welcome day or other opportunity for parents and/or children to get acquainted, make sure to attend.
- Take the time to talk. Ask your child what he would like to know about the new school. Write down the questions and find out the answers; or if it's an older child, suggest ways he can get the answers himself.
- Take the time to visit the school. Call ahead to get an appointment or get permission for you and the child to take a self-tour of the building. Practice the walk to school or the walk to the bus stop.
- Talk about what will happen during a typical school day. Go through the schedule with your child. Help the child anticipate possible trouble spots and discuss what to do if these problems occur. ("What are some things you can do if that happens?")
- Let your child know it's normal to feel apprehensive. Share childhood memories of times when you were apprehensive about a new situation and it worked out okay.

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Be available:

- Try to be extra available to your child when school starts. Prioritize and postpone things that don't absolutely have to be done so you will have time for your child.
- Let your child express negative feelings. Even though some of his/her concerns seem minor to you ("I don't have any friends"), take them seriously, listen with empathy, and suggest coping strategies. Follow up in a few days to see how things are going.
- If your child seems stressed or worried about typical, everyday kinds of situations, be ready to problem-solve and strategize solutions. For example, if he can't work the combination lock, practice with him/her until he/she can.
- If your child seems overly stressed, unable to cope, reluctant to go to school or truly unhappy, seek help. Start with the teacher or counselor. It's best to address problems before they escalate and become overwhelming. Clearly identify your concerns and take specific, concrete steps to solve them.

Be positive:

- Expect the transition to be ultimately successful. Remember that adjustments take time and first impressions are not always accurate. Your own positive attitude can help your child be positive, too. Let your child know you are confident he will do fine.
- Make it clear that you want to be considered a partner in your child's education. Don't stop being involved in the school just because your child has entered middle or high school. Learn about the school philosophy, policies and curriculum. Get to know other parents of children in the school.
- Find opportunities to comment to your child on the positive aspects of the change. ("It's great they have a drama club--I know you've always wanted to try acting.")
- Pay attention to your own feelings about the new family stage you are entering and build for the future.
- Plan time for fun as a family to relieve stress, strengthen family ties and keep perspective. Remember that through all kinds of transitions, throughout life, families can be a steady source of support for one another.

If you have questions or concerns, please contact
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