

Tips to Ease New School Jitters

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You may need to help your child prepare for the emotional and intellectual challenges a new school brings. This article provides helpful tips and information for easing the transition.

Entering a New Elementary School

Most elementary schools offer some sort of orientation before the school year officially starts to familiarize students with teachers and the school environment. Some teachers write letters to new students, others may arrange to visit with the child before school begins. Contact the school to find out what orientation programs they offer. The following tips may also help.

- **Attend a school orientation and/or visit the school beforehand** (the classrooms, hallways, cafeteria, etc.) so your child is familiar with the school environment.
- **Ask the school for names of families in the neighborhood** so your child can contact other students or arrange a "play date" before school begins. This will help your child recognize a familiar face on his or her first day of school. **Note:** For security reasons, some schools may not provide this information.
- **Remind your child that he or she will make new friends.**
- **If your child performed well in a previous school, remind him or her of past successes.** If your child had difficulties at school, reassure your child that he or she can start fresh with a clean slate.
- **Make school preparations fun.** Organize school supplies together; select clothes to wear for the first day; pack a special first lunch.
- **Talk about some of the fun activities planned for the school year,** but make sure events are confirmed. You don't want to dash your child's hopes with false promises.
- **Suggest that your child bring a toy or other personal article** to keep in the classroom.
- **Keep a routine;** if your child previously participated in an extracurricular activity, find a similar activity at the new school.
- **Talk with your child's teacher and counselor** so you can all work together to help your child make the transition to a new school more smoothly.
- **Ask the principal if the school has an orientation and/or buddy program** that helps orient new students.

If your child seems very nervous and/or is refusing to go to school, ask your child what is causing the anxiety. Depending on the situation, speak to his or her teacher and/or guidance counselor. If your child's anxiety does not subside within a reasonable time, consider seeking additional counseling to help pinpoint the cause(s). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, when school starts, ask your child about his or her daily experiences. Use open-ended questions such as "What did you enjoy most about school today?" and avoid close-ended questions such as "How was school?" that don't always generate discussion.

Entering a New Secondary School

Middle school and high school students may have different concerns about attending a new school. They may, for example, be concerned about the new environment, meeting new friends, having new teachers -- not to mention increased academic and personal responsibilities and pressures. Most schools offer orientation programs for freshmen and transfer students to help acquaint them with their surroundings, teachers and other students.

Tips for Helping Your Secondary Student Adjust to a New School

- Contact the school to ask about registration, course requirements and any steps you and/or your child need to take before the school year begins. Find out when your child can expect to receive a class schedule, school map and/or other pertinent information.
- Find out if all of the credits from your child's previous school and/or summer school credits (if applicable) will transfer to the new school and how this will affect his or her curriculum.
- Urge your child to attend any orientation programs offered by the school.
- Obtain a map of the school and help your child locate his or her homeroom, classrooms, the cafeteria, etc.
- Encourage your child to participate in extracurricular activities such as sports, clubs and volunteer groups which will help him or her make new friends and learn new skills and activities.
- Suggest that your child contact other friends who will be attending the same school, and suggest they go to school together on the first day.

If your child is particularly anxious about starting school, contact his or her guidance counselor or dean of students for advice. If your child will be attending a boarding school, you may need to make additional preparations. Contact the school to ask about orientation programs, a suggested packing list and visitation policies.

Special Needs

If your child has special needs, you may want to make additional preparations. Contact your child's school to coordinate any special care plans or arrangements (i.e., assistive devices, medications, handicapped-accessible transportation) and speak with your child about these arrangements.



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