

Helping Children Cope With School Transitions

Going to a new school or starting a new grade level is exciting and sometimes frightening for children. Whether going from primary to secondary school or starting a new school after a move or redistricting, etc., children are confronted with a new physical environment to navigate, new school rules and regulations to learn, and the pressures of trying to fit in.

Parents can help children acclimate by providing extra reassurance and helping with organization in the first days or weeks. Here are some things you can do to help your child get off to a good start:

- Visit the school with your child (beforehand, if possible). Go with the child to practice the route to school and plot out where classes are. If a school map is available, get one for your child to keep in a wallet, purse, or backpack.
- Meet the teachers, administrators, and office personnel. When you know the personnel, you can remind your child who to go to for school-related issues such as lost and found, reporting bullies, illness, etc. By getting to know the staff, especially the teachers, you show that you care about your child's school experience, which inspires a positive first impression for your child.
- Make sure you review the student handbook with your child. The handbook will explain school rules and regulations, curriculum information, parent involvement opportunities, contact information, dress code, and more.
- Show your child organizational tricks for managing homework assignments

and activity schedules. Also, be sure to remind her to keep valuables like keys, calculators, etc., in a safe place. Theft is a significant problem in some schools.

- Provide stable daily routines and habits at home. A consistent home schedule will be comforting during the disorienting first weeks at the new school. As much as possible, have your child stick to a regular homework time and good homework habits.
 - Talk to your child about ways to make friends. You can remind him to be friendly and cheerful, to be kind to people, not to tease or make fun, not to be bossy or whiny or complain too much, and to keep a sense of humor if someone teases him. Some people tease to cover their own nervousness, and by sharing the joke in a confident but self-effacing way, your child can disarm the teaser and earn respect.
- Suggest that your child make the first move toward friendship by joining in at a lunch table or on the playground, giving his name and asking for introductions, and then asking an open ended question as a conversation starter – “How long have you been going to this school?” or “What did you think of the book Mrs. Jones had us read this week?”
- If your child talks about feeling nervous or scared, acknowledge that it is natural and okay to feel that way – most new students do. Don't discount her feelings as silly or cowardly. To do so may make the child feel there is something wrong with her for feeling the way she does, leaving her with more insecurities.

- Find out about school and community activities that your child might like: sports, scouting, art, swimming, music groups, etc. Participating in extra-curricular activities is a great way to meet people and make friends.
- Be calm and cheerful when talking to your child about the school. It's important not to fuss or show your own anxieties about your child's success and acceptance. If he feels you are worried, he might think there is more to worry about than he thought. Parents often remember painful times from their own difficult childhood experience and want to protect their children from any hurt feelings or fears. Reassure yourself that your child will find his own way.
- Ask your child to remember that she is a good-hearted, fun, interesting person who doesn't need to settle for friends who take advantage or try to get her to do things she doesn't want to do. Good friends are people who respect her decisions and values and who believe, like she does, in doing the right thing.

Problems? Call the Student Assistance Program and arrange to talk to a counselor. Contacts are confidential within legal limits and available at no cost to students and their family members.

Call (515) 244-6090 or (800) 327-4692.
TTY: (515) 288-9022 or (877) 542-6488.