

Getting Acquainted with Your New School

Starting at a new school can be intimidating for children and may cause intense anxiety and nervousness at summer's end. Ease the transition with these back-to-school techniques. They will help you and your child start off the new school year smoothly.

Practice the Route

Make sure the route to and from school is familiar to your child. If he is expected to walk or bike, then take a few practice runs with him and point out landmarks along the way. Make sure he is comfortable with going it alone by the time the first day of school arrives.

If he is carpooling with other students, then get in touch with the participating parents to hash out the scheduling details before school starts. Over the summer, make sure your child meets all of the students in the carpool. Even if your child does not become close with any of them, he will feel more comfortable starting out the school year surrounded by familiar faces.

If your child is taking the school bus, then find out the exact time and location of pickup and drop-off. If you have any concerns about safety, contact the school's administration office.

Don't Diminish Fears

Allow your child to discuss her fears with you without interruption or excuse. You may feel guilty about moving your child to a new school district, or you may think that indulging your child's fears will only elevate them, but it is important to allow your son or daughter to express concerns. Discussing her thoughts may allow her to pinpoint exactly what is causing her anxiety – and you'll be better able to help. Sometimes simply venting alleviates nervousness. However, even if this conversation makes no difference in your child's level of apprehension and distress, you are still instilling within her the knowledge that she can come to you with any concerns.

Explore the New School

Obtain a copy of your child's schedule and block off time to explore the entire campus. Take a few "dry runs" with your child, and walk through his school-day schedule. Do this as many times as it takes for your child to feel comfortable. Also, if he has a locker, be sure to check it out and practice using the combination to open it. Visit the cafeteria, bathrooms, library, and nurse's office.

Make a point of stopping by the principal's office – receptionists are often there in the last weeks of August. Introduce yourself and your child, and use this opportunity to ask any questions or express concerns.

If your child is in high school, he may be embarrassed to walk around his new school with a parent, so encourage him to check it out by himself or with a friend. Assure him you will drop him off and pick him up. This is an important step, so make it as convenient as possible.

Meet the Teachers

Inquire as to whether you can be introduced to your child's teachers before the school year begins. On the first day, your child will be faced with so much that's new. She may feel more comfortable if she has met and talked with her teachers beforehand. Contact the school and see if a brief conference is feasible – ideally on the day when you will be visiting the school.

Encourage Your Child to Get Involved in Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities are a great way for children to make new friends with people who share similar interests. Obtain a list of school clubs and teams, and go over it with your child to see if he is interested in any of them. Also, remind your child that extracurricular activities often begin before the academic year, so getting involved may mean that your child will meet some of his new classmates before that first day of school.

Get Comfortable with Expectations

Make sure your child knows what is expected from her academically. Although the school is new, she will be expected to have read all of the summer reading materials and to have completed all of the summer assignments. You should also touch base with the teacher to ensure that the skill-level of the class is comparable to your child's abilities. Your child will feel much more comfortable if she can perform confidently in the classroom.

Early to Bed, Early to Rise

Summer schedules are flexible and routines are often broken. However, it will ease the transition back to school if you enforce a reasonable bedtime in the weeks approaching the start of school. Not only will this make your school mornings easier, but your child will be composed and clearheaded, which can help to minimize those first-day butterflies.

Medications

If your child needs to take medication during the school day, make sure that all arrangements are finalized well before school begins. Fill out the appropriate forms, speak to the nurse, and make sure that your child is aware of when and where her medication will be dispensed. Put a reminder note in her lunch box or backpack if necessary, and don't be afraid to call the nurse during the day to ensure that your child has taken her pills.

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