

Helping Your Child Adjust to a New School: Suggestions for Parents and Caregivers From the Maryland School Mental Health Alliance*

Perhaps your family has moved to a new neighborhood, or has relocated for a job opportunity or to be closer to family. Whatever the reasons for the change, starting a new school can be difficult for both your child and you. The following are suggestions for ways in which parents and other caregivers can help children feel more comfortable and secure as they adjust to a new school.

Introduce yourselves to your new school

- Make sure that the new school expects you: register your child *before the first day of class*;
- If possible, visit your child's new school: try to meet the office staff, principal, and teachers before the transition to establish a personal connection and to help them prepare for your child's arrival;
- Some schools have "welcome packets" to give to new families; if not, try to get basic information, such as what time the school day begins and ends, the procedure for lunch (can your child buy lunch, does the school provide snacks, etc.), transportation procedures (how does the bus work?), and information about health services and emergency procedures;
- Try to meet other school families; if you have an elementary school-aged child, see if you can arrange a "play date" with another child in the same grade (preferably *before the first day of school*.) Some schools have "buddies" who can help your child get through those first days, and who can answer any questions your child might have;
- Become involved in your child's new school. Consider joining the PTA, or volunteering at the school; the more involved you are, the more your child will feel like his or her school is important to you and the more connected he or she will feel;

Help your child adjust:

- Make sure your child understands the reasons for changing schools; if you have an older child, try to give him or her as much "advance notice" as possible so that he or she will have time to adjust to the idea;
- If time allows, show your child his or her new school and the surrounding neighborhood; see if you can arrange for a student to show your child around the school and introduce him or her to teachers and staff; some schools have a "buddy system" or other ways of helping your child meet other children in the school;
- Make sure the school has what it needs to make the best decisions concerning your child's classroom placement and academic and social needs; confirm that the new school has obtained your child's educational, health, and other relevant records

- It is perfectly normal for a child to feel anxious, scared, or irritable during times of transition. Let your child know that you understand that this is difficult; take the time to listen to his or her concerns, and spend time together while your child develops new school connections and friendships;
- Encourage your child to feel good during this stressful time: encourage (or enforce) a schedule including a regular bedtime and a healthy breakfast;
- If your child had a negative experience at his or her last school, speak positively about the fresh opportunity that the new school presents. Help your child develop new goals for school success;
- If your child is young, or is particularly nervous, consider accompanying him or her to school for the first few days;
- Encourage your child to become involved in school activities, sports, or after-school clubs;
- Make sure your child has what he or she needs for the first day of school (ask the school, if you don't have this information.)
- Help your child identify something good about his or her new school, and offer comfort and reassurance that adjusting to a new school takes time.

For more ideas about helping your child adjust to a new school, see:

1. **Algonquin College:** First Day Jitters
<http://www.algonquincollege.com/humanresources/documents/FirstDayJitters...WS.pdf>
2. **Greatschools.net** provides tips for helping children adjust to a new school:
<http://www.greatschools.net/cgi-bin/showarticle/NY/60>
3. **Kid's Relocation Issues** : Easing the trauma of moving for children.
http://www.rpsrelocation.com/kids_issues.htm

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