

## Helping Your Child Through a Successful School Transition

From time to time, children need to make a transition into a new school. This can be due to moving from one grade level configuration to the next (elementary to middle school), a family move across town following the purchase of a new home in a new neighborhood, a job transfer to a different city or state, or loss of a job and relocation. There are a variety of reasons that children can be required to settle into a new school setting and each move is just as important to you and your child, whether it is across town or across the state. As parents, our first concern is to make sure that our child feels safe, secure and has a positive experience. There are several tips to success in helping children move that can make the experience less stressful and help children to feel more secure and safe in their new school.

- 1) Although parents are often stressed and nervous about a pending move, children don't necessarily understand the complexities of the move. They may only sense your emotions and react to **your** stress and worries. It is important to **keep conversations about your worries separate from your children**. They need your assurance that the adults in their life will work out the problems or issues, and that they feel supported.
- 2) Help your child to **find the positive things about moving to a new school**. This might include identifying other students that your child may already know that will be in the new school, emphasizing that there will be an opportunity to make new friends that may have similar interests or be part of activities that your family already is involved in, closeness to your work, etc.
- 3) **Emphasize the things that will be familiar or the same** for your child at the new school. Even though it may seem obvious to you, it may not for your child. For example, tell your child that there will still be recess, lunch, P.E., Music, a playground, music activities, band, etc.
- 4) **Let your child talk** about what they may be concerned about or their fears. Bringing these things out into the open will help you have conversations and design activities that will help to alleviate their fears. Keep this dialogue child-centered and solution-oriented. This is not a time for you to share your concerns or worries. Problem solve with your child what you can do to help them work through their concerns or to support them.
- 5) **Visit the new school**, principal, teachers as soon as you can. Help your child to locate important places within the school. The more they are familiar with their new school, the easier it will be for them to come to their new school on their own for the first time.
- 6) Plan a **few visits to the new school** that include spending time with the teacher, exploring the classroom, and playing on the playground. Decide ahead on an individual basis whether visits occur when other children are present.
- 7) Parents should **share any concerns or special considerations** regarding their child, such as certain fears, level of toilet training, food allergies, etc.

8) If the child has been in a different program already, **encourage communication between receiving and sending teachers**, particularly if the child has special needs or particular issues coping in the classroom.

9) **Don't over-react if the first few days are a little rough.** Young children in particular may experience separation anxiety or shyness initially but teachers should be trained to help them adjust. If a child cries at drop off, parents should remain calm and positive. They should not linger but rather reassure the child that he will be okay and that they will be back soon.

10) During the first few weeks of school **teachers and parents should share information** about how they think the child is adjusting to school.

11) Ideally, parents should **plan to spend extra quiet one-on-one time** with their child during the first weeks. Keep the family schedule as simple as possible to allow for adjustment needs.

12) **Arrange play dates** with a new friend (or friends) from school. Strengthening social bonds with classmates helps build children's sense of familiarity and comfort level in school.

13) If possible, parents should **try to volunteer** in the classroom at least periodically throughout the year. Doing so helps even children feel that their school and family life are linked. Being in the classroom is also a good way to develop a relationship with the child's teacher and classmates, and to get firsthand exposure to their classroom environment and routine.

*Used with Permission from the National Association of School Psychologists  
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