

Tips for Easy Back-to-School Transitions

Notes from the Counselor's Office



The summer is just about over. No more going to bed late, sleeping in every morning, or playing outside until dark. Now the routine has to change. Beginning kindergarten or going back to elementary school usually means two things to a young child: 1) a stricter time schedule; and 2) adapting to a different school, teacher, classroom, friends, or academic challenges. These new experiences can bring on stress or cause children to resist necessary adjustments. Even as adults, we sometimes feel uncomfortable or anxious when facing a new situation. Think how overwhelming it must be for young children who have far less experience in dealing with the unknown! Smooth transitions can be accomplished if the adults who care for children try to view the situation from the child's perspective. Here are some tips on what you can do to make going back to school a pleasurable experience.

Prepare in advance

Young children always feel more comfortable if they know what to expect. Before the new school year begins, family members can explain to children how their daily routines will change. Precisely describe what the morning routines will be in age-appropriate terms. Some children may enjoy creating a pictorial chart to include each step of the morning schedule.

Try getting up earlier a couple of days before the new school year begins and explain why you're doing it. This may prevent your child from being confused, groggy, cranky, or refusing to get out of bed on the first day of the new program.

Discuss how the school environment will be different from the previous year. If possible, before the school year begins, allow your child to visit his classroom, and become familiar with the building and the playground. These visits can be valuable to children because they'll be exposed to their new surroundings and still find comfort in going home with a familiar adult or loved one. Make the visit extra special by going out for ice cream or to the park afterwards.

Reading books with children is a great way to introduce any experience. They can see how other children beginning school or a new grade have the same feelings of uncertainty and how they overcome them.

Involve children in preparing for school. For example, they can lay out their clothes, pack a backpack, or select a favorite toy or photo to take with them to school. **Talk about feelings**

Encourage children to describe how they feel about the "new year" and try to ease any fears they may have. Let them know that it is natural to be a little nervous anytime you start something new, but that they will be just fine once they become familiar with their classmates, teacher, and school routine.

Parents may also feel sad or fearful about their children going off to kindergarten or moving up to a learning environment for older children. If your emotions are too obvious, you may spoil your child's enthusiasm for the first day. Exude confidence and good feelings when saying good-bye.

Avoid yelling if your child resists getting up from bed, brushing his teeth, or getting dressed, and expect an occasional meltdown. Beginning something new can be stressful and adjustment takes a lot of concentration and effort. Teachers and families should expect--and be prepared to handle--a few tears and other emotional displays from young children.

Be there

If possible, arrive at the new school early on the first few days to help the child settle in. If your child is anxious about school, send personal "love" notes in their lunch box or book bag. Reassure them that you love them, will think of them during the day, and will be back. Remain calm and positive.

It is also important to arrange for predictable pick-up schedules. Children need to feel confident from the beginning that they can count on a loved one to come back and to come when they said they would. Use the commute to ease the transition between school and home.

How adults handle transitional situations can set the stage for how well a child adjusts to other challenges in life. Those who love and care for children can help them adapt by making preparations in advance, clearly explaining the changes about to take place, and listening if doubts or fears develop.

Your School Counselor – Arlene Hagendorf

I am looking forward to welcoming your children as they begin the new school year. I hope that they will feel that I am a friendly face for them to turn to. It is my pleasure to work with all the students at County Road and Luther Lee Emerson in their classrooms, in small groups, or individually as the need arises. Please let me know if there is any way that I can be of help to you and your children. You can reach me by telephone at 201-784-2084, extension 230. Please visit my web page on the Demarest website at www.nvnet.org for helpful resources.