

Helping Kids Adjust to School: Useful Tips for Parents and Educators



How early childhood professionals can help:

- Make sure activities are developmentally appropriate for children. Activities that are interesting, challenging, and doable will help children feel comfortable in their new setting.
- Make an effort to get to know each individual child as quickly as possible. Parents can provide information about children's likes, dislikes, and special interests.
- Welcome suggestions from families, particularly those of children with special needs. Parents can offer specific suggestions they have found useful for their child and advise on classroom setup and modifications.
- Hold an orientation for children and parents. Small groups encourage children to get to know each other.
- Show children around the new school or program, introducing them to other adults who are there to help them become acclimated.
- Create partnerships between preschools and elementary schools in the community. Focus meetings on sharing ideas and concerns.
- Set up an area for photos of parents and family members that children may "visit" throughout the day. Also, include items that reflect the cultural experiences of the children to help promote a sense of mutual respect and understanding. Children, just like adults, need time to adjust to new people and situations.

Back-to-school time inevitably brings many changes for children and families: the first day of kindergarten or first grade; new preschools or childcare settings; and new classrooms and new teachers.

Transitions are exciting opportunities for children to learn and grow. Parents and early childhood professionals share a role in making children feel safe and secure as they move to new educational settings. Of course, such milestones in children's lives can cause anxiety, too. Strengthening the ties between educational professionals and families will help create smooth transitions for both adults and children.

How parents can help:

- Be enthusiastic about the upcoming change. If you are excited and confident, your child will be, too.
- Prepare yourself. Take note of how your child reacts to separation. If possible, visit the new setting together. Introduce your child to the new teacher or early childhood professional in advance.
- Arrange a play date with another child from the program, preferably one-on-one, so that your child will see a familiar face.
- Start daily routines that will add continuity. Let your child become involved with packing lunch or laying out clothes. Also, begin an earlier bedtime several weeks before.
- Put aside extra time, particularly on the first day of school, for chatting and communing together. But remember not to prolong the goodbye. If your child whines or clings, staying will only make it harder.
- Always say goodbye to your child. Be firm but friendly about separating. Never ridicule a child for crying. Instead, make supportive statements like, "It's hard to say goodbye."
- At the end of the workday, put aside your concerns about your career and focus on being a parent.

Experience helps to ease transitions but change can still be stressful. Patience and understanding on the part of parents, caregivers, and teachers help children learn how to approach new situations with confidence—a skill that helps them make successful transitions throughout their lives.