

Helping Your Child Cope with School Transitions

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Children report moving, leaving friends, and changing grades or schools as being highly stressful. To assist them with transitions the following ideas may be helpful:

- If the family is moving, take pictures of friends and familiar places and offer ways to keep in contact with close friends via phone, email, and letters. Help your child talk about what he or she will miss and about what will be new and different.
- Encourage your child to discuss the future transition by asking questions such as, "What have you been thinking about your new school?" Make a list of your child's concerns and together try to find answers to the questions. Many schools have Internet sites that describe procedures, show virtual tours, and answer common questions.
- If you have a choice of schools, listen to your child's ideas about what is important to him or her. After visiting various schools, openly discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each. Although the final decision is yours, it is important that your child feel included in the decision making process.
- Help your child get to know the new environment beforehand. When possible visit the school together. Even viewing it from a car or seeing a photograph of the building is better than leaving the first day to the child's imagination.
- Let your child know it is natural to feel apprehensive. He or she may be fearful of not being accepted by peers or about mastering the logistics or academics of a new grade or school. Share childhood memories of times when you were worried about a new situation. Relate the good things that happened like how you met your best friend or that your new teacher was one of your favorites.
- Keep the days leading up to the transition as positive as possible. Stress that his or her class will offer many new experiences. The night before the first day, have your child lay out everything needed for school. The next morning allow time to get ready in a calm manner.
- Buy school supplies and required materials. Go over the walk to school or to the bus stop. Empower your child by discussing actions he or she can take if a problem arises. Ask, "What concerns you most about school?" Listen and then ask, "If that happens, what will you do?" Help your child think of constructive ways to deal with a difficult situation.
- Expect the transition to be ultimately successful. Yet, remember that adjustments take time and the first days in a new school are often overwhelming. Your attitude can help your child; let him or her know you are confident in his ability to adjust well.
- Attend the school's orientation, open house, and/or tour the school with your child. Be involved by asking for a copy of the school's calendar and handbook. Join the Parent-Teacher



Organization or parent advisory board. Get to know other parents, especially parents of your child's new friends.

- Be available after school starts. Understand that your child may need extra time, attention and support. When there is a change, he or she may regress to an earlier developmental stage. Plan time for family fun because when transitions occur, families are a necessary source of love and support.
- Invite your child to express his or her emotions. Even when a concern seems minor to you, be respectful and know that it can be a major crisis to your child. Try to put yourself in his or her place and understand the feelings expressed. Ask open ended questions like, "How's it going?" or make comments like, "You seem sad." Then listen carefully and avoid giving advice unless your child asks for it.
- Help your child explore ways to cope with concerns, and continue to be available for further discussion. Be ready to problem-solve with him or her. You may want to role play a situation that is causing anxiety.
- Encourage your child to try new things by participating in one or two extracurricular activities. Help him or her understand that trying is what is important, and that one does not always have to be successful.
- Continue to foster your child's organizational skills and assist him or her in becoming responsible and independent. Stay interested and provide rules and structure. Yet, allow your child to have input into what the rules are.
- If after an adjustment period of time, your child is reluctant to go to school or seems truly unhappy, seek help. Identify your concerns and meet with your child's teacher and/or school counselor. Together, perhaps with the child being present, work out a plan of action.

<http://www.kellybear.com/ParentTips/ParentTip8.html>

