

## Helping Children Adjust to School (Pre-school and Elementary)

The transition from summer break to back-to-school can be difficult for both students and families. Whether a child is beginning their first day of preschool, transitioning into middle school, or starting at a new school, change will be inevitable. Making a smooth transition between home and school requires teachers and early childhood professionals to help children feel confident and teach them to trust other adults and children.

Families and early childhood professionals share a role in making children feel safe and secure as they move to new educational settings. While school offers exciting opportunities for children to learn and grow, it can also cause anxiety. Strengthening the ties between educational professionals and families will help create smooth transitions for both adults and children. Here are some tips that families, educators, and childhood professionals can follow:

### How family members can help:

1. **Be enthusiastic about the upcoming change.** If you are excited and confident, your child will be, too.
2. **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.
3. **Arrange a playdate** with another child from the program or class, preferably one-on-one, so that your child will see a familiar face on the first day of school.
4. **Start daily routines** that will add continuity. Let your child become involved with packing his/her lunch or laying out his/her clothes. Also, begin an earlier bedtime several weeks before the first day.
5. **Put aside extra time**, particularly on the first day of school, for chatting and communing together. But remember not to prolong the good-bye. If your child cries or clings, staying will only make it harder.
6. **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 but I will be back soon. I can't wait to hear all about your day"
7. **At the end of the day**, ask your day how his or her day was and what was his/her favorite part or ask about something new he/she learned. Try to ask questions that require more than a yes or no response.

**How teachers or early childhood professionals can help:**

1. **Make sure activities** are developmentally appropriate for children. Activities that are interesting, challenging, and achievable will help children feel comfortable in their new setting.
2. **Make an effort to get to know each individual child** as quickly as possible. Family members can provide information about children's likes, dislikes, and special interests.
3. **Be open to suggestions from families**, particularly those of children with special needs. Families can offer specific suggestions they have found useful for their child and advise on classroom set-up and modifications.
4. **Hold an orientation for children and families.** Small groups encourage children to get to know each other.
5. **Show children around the new school** and introduce them to other adults who are there to help them become acclimated.
6. **Create partnerships** between preschools and elementary schools in the community. Focus meetings on sharing ideas and concerns.
7. **Set up an area for photos of children and their family members** that children may visit throughout the day. You may also set up a designated area for children to bring in a special item that reflects the cultural experiences of the children to help promote a sense of mutual respect and community.. Children, just like adults, need time to adjust to new people and situations. Experience helps to ease transitions, but, change can still be stressful. Patience and understanding on the part of families and teachers help children learn how to approach new situations with confidence—a skill that helps them make successful transitions throughout their lives!

**Source:** National Association for the Education of Young Children

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