

PLANNING AHEAD FOR THE 1ST DAY OF SCHOOL

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The first day of school is one of the most traumatic days for children and teachers and of course parents. Can you imagine what it must feel like to be in a room with fifteen 6 year old boys and girls, and no assistance and no parents and not really know any of the children? Now imagine that half of those children are screaming and trying to make a break for the front door or that a lot of them are still crying since their parent left the classroom. One can also imagine how each parent has felt as they walk out the door of the classroom and realize that the academic experience is now starting and in what seems like a few years their son and daughter will be heading off to college and out of the house. Imagine the guilt that a lot of parents are feeling as they walk out the door and hear their son or daughter crying for them.

A little advance preparation can make the first week a lot easier. Tailor these strategies to suit you and your child as you prepare for the big day.

Practice going to school. Make a dry run to help your child get familiar with the route and the routine. Point out interesting sights or places familiar to your child. Notice the swings, slides, or other fun stuff that your think your child will like — and try them out together.

Describe what will happen on the first day. Keep in mind that a child starting school for the first time or going to a new school may have a hard time imagining what it will be like (You've been to school before, but they haven't.) Talking about the basic sequence of the day will help your child make a mental movie of what to expect. Kids form pictures in their minds, and reviewing the process in detail will make things more familiar and less scary on the first day of school.

Ask your child compelling questions. Specific questions will help your child imagine what school will be like and help you talk about the fun stuff and the hard stuff. You might ask,
“What do you think the hardest part of school is going to be?”
“Is there anything that worries you about starting school?”
“What are you really looking forward to?”

Start going to bed earlier. One or two weeks before school begins, start rolling bedtime back to a school schedule. Begin slowly, waking your child up 15 minutes earlier every day and going to bed 15 minutes earlier each night until she is back on track.

Meet kids in the class. If your child is going to a new school, find out if there will be a class gathering before the first day; it can be helpful to see familiar faces when she walks into a new classroom. Even if your child already has friends at school, schedule some play dates with kids your child may not have seen over the summer.

Learn about the drop-off policy. Find out about the policy for parents walking children into the classroom and how long you can stay. If you anticipate that your child will need extra time to adjust, talk to the teacher before school

starts, if you can.

Give children control over what they can control. Offering simple choices may help calm nerves and get kids excited. For example, if you pick out a new backpack or lunchbox, let your child choose the color. If you shop for school supplies, let your child find the items in the store and check them off on your list. The day before school starts let your child choose clothes for the first day — but keep veto power!

Plan ahead how you will say goodbye. Think about what your child needs in a goodbye. What will be most helpful — a quick goodbye, or five minutes of cuddle time with you?

Read books about starting school. Whether you're going to a new school or a new grade, books about it will get kids talking and feeling comfortable. Some good ones include *The Berenstain Bears Go to School* by Stan and Jan Berenstain, *Annabelle Swift, Kindergartner* by Amy Schwartz, *First Day Jitters* by Julie Dannenberg, *I Am Absolutely Too Small for School* by Lauren Child.

Starting School

The First Days of School

Try these strategies to help your child (and you) get in the groove of the first days of school.

Get up early. This means you can have a relaxed breakfast, leave enough time to deal with upsets — and still get to school on time.

Don't talk about how much you will miss your child. Don't let your own worries get in the way. Walk your child into school (or put her on the school bus) and then talk to other parents if you need support. Your child has enough to worry about on the first day without soothing your anxieties.

Focus on fun. If you escort your child to school, check out the playground before you go in. Meet the teacher together and take a look around the new classroom for things you know he enjoys, like art supplies, a fish tank, or the reading corner.

If your child gets upset, acknowledge the feeling and ask her for suggestions. You might say, "I know you're upset. I bet other kids are too. Let's think about what will help you feel better." Suggest reading a book together or starting an activity.

Ask the teacher for help. If your child won't let you go, turn to the teacher. She probably has a lot of experience with this. You might say, "Let's go say hello to your teacher together. She will take great care of you."

Make a swift exit. Take your cue from the teacher and from your child, but when it's time to go, go. A quick exit may be more useful to your child than a drawn-out goodbye. You can often call school later to check on how a young child is doing. And you'll probably find out that she's doing fine.