



Easing the Transition Back to School for Early Elementary Students

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Back to school time brings with it changes that generate both excitement and anxiety for parents and children. Following a new daily routine, meeting new people, learning the rules and expectations of a new teacher, and finding one's way around a new space are all adjustments that children have to make at the start of a new school year. Parents must also make numerous adjustments as their children head back to the classroom, and they should keep in mind that starting a new school year can be an emotional and stressful process for them as well. Following are some ideas about how parents can ease their child's transition back to school to help everyone involved start on the right foot.

The week before school starts, call your child's teacher and ask if it would be possible to come in to the classroom with your child to meet the teacher and learn a bit about what the classroom routine will be. Prepare your child with some questions to ask the teacher, such as: What are the rules of the classroom? When do we have lunch? When do we have recess? Where will my seat be in the classroom? How much time should I be spending on homework a night? (Other questions may arise during the family meeting, discussed below.)

Have a private conversation with your child's teacher about the learning needs and personality of your child. Be proactive about setting up interventions to support your child, such as where your child will be seated in the classroom, who he is sitting next to, whether your child should be assigned regular duties to keep him busy, and the extent to which your child will need to be prepared for transitions and changes in the daily routine. Also establish with the teacher when and how you will communicate with each other. Email and daily or weekly notebooks are the most common methods for communication. Conveying a sense of support and collaboration to the teacher is usually well-received. Convene a family meeting at least a week before school starts to discuss what changes will take place during the transition back to school. Bring up topics such as homework times and after-school activities. Ask your child what he is looking forward to about school and what he is worried or wondering about.

School-week bedtimes should be initiated at least a week before school starts and increased structure should be gradually introduced to your child's day. Have your child

practice sitting in one place and staying on task during activities, such as drawing, journaling, painting, puzzling, reading, etc.

Normalize the experience of returning to school by reading back-to-school stories with your child. Recommended books include:

The Kissing Hand, by Audrey Penn

Chrysanthemum by Kevin Henkes

Stand Tall Molly Lou Melon by Patty Lovell

Arthur Goes to School, by Marc Brown

Be sure to contain your own anxiety about the school year starting, and convey a sense of confidence and excitement about your child returning to school. By the first day of school, your child should know the name of his teacher, where the classroom is in the school building, and what the plan is for after school. On the first day of school, be comforting but firm with your child about separating. Avoid prolonged good-byes and permit the school staff to step in and integrate your child into his new setting. Make sure that you set aside ample time after school to talk with your child about how the day went and to prepare for the following school day.