

Separation Anxiety and Starting School

The first day of school can be a source of excitement and nervousness for both parents and children. Fear of the unknown is often behind children's worries. The school setting is a lot bigger than most children are used to, and the routines, expectations and people are all new. Feeling anxious, tears and even tantrums are not uncommon during this big transition.



Parents also often find themselves emotional at the commencement of this milestone, with their little ones growing up, or they might be concerned about how the day will go. If their child is having a harder time with the separation, parents can also feel a lot of guilt and worry.

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Five tips for supporting this transition:



Have Positive Discussions

Over the summer, regularly talk to your child about school with positive and curious language. If you're excited about school, they usually will be too. The school has also provided a social story about school, and reading this regularly is important.



Visit the Environment

Attend the orientation sessions so you and your child can become familiar with the space. If you missed these or think your child would benefit from an additional visit, you can contact the school to discuss options.



Practice Beforehand

Over the summer, practice as much of the school day as you can. Practice the walk to the school or bus stop regularly. Spend some time in the uniform before the first day so your child is used to how it feels. Practice packing the school bag together so your child knows where all their things will be. Practice the morning routine, and consider making a visual schedule of the routine, so your child knows what to do. Every aspect of the school day that they can gain confidence in before school starts is one less thing they need to worry about.



Manage Your Anxiety

If you are feeling anxious about your child's first day, this usually only fuels their anxiety. Take some time to regulate your emotions first if needed, so you can be excited and confident with them.



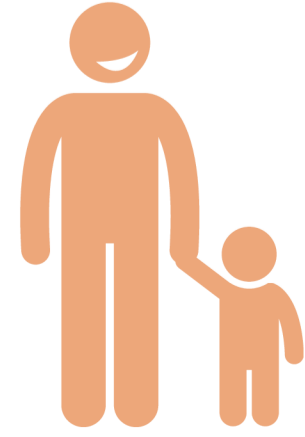
A Quick Drop-off Routine

Don't linger at drop-off, and show confidence during the drop-off routine. If your child is expressing concern at drop-off, it is important to acknowledge and validate the concerns, but also to reassure them, for example, "I can see you're feeling nervous, it can be scary going somewhere new, but your friend Jane Doe will be here, and I will pick you up at 3 pm from this gate".



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If your child is having a difficult time with the transition, it is important to remember that this generally passes quickly. Parents often worry about leaving them at school if they are distressed, so stay to try and make them feel better first before leaving. Generally, doing that only prolongs the distress, and most children are their happy selves quickly after their parent leaves. Generally the fear of separation resolves after a few days or weeks as the child becomes comfortable at school. Indulging in long goodbyes, hovering, or giving the child days off tends to only reinforce the child's worry and make it worse.



If you are concerned about your child, or their separation anxiety is not resolving, the first thing to do is to talk to their teacher. They can provide feedback on how things are at school, help establish drop-off routines, and get the Learning and Support Team involved if needed. Other supports also include your family doctor, and the Raising Children's Network.

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/>