

10 Ways to Help Young Kids Adjust to School

For most young children, going back to school is both an exciting and anxiety-provoking transition. Whether your child is going to school for the first time, relocating to a new school, or returning to the same school, these tips will help you prepare your child for a smooth transition!

1. **Visit the school.** Take your child to the school a few times to maintain a sense of familiarity. Point out the places or things that might be of interest to your child, such as the playground, classroom, and bathrooms.
2. **Have play dates with new classmates.** This will help your child feel comfortable with other kids in the class. Also, try to find children that may have the same interests as your child. For example, there may be children from the church in your child's class.
3. **Don't overemphasize the positive.** Highlighting the positive aspects of school is helpful, but try not to overemphasize them because this may create unrealistic expectations for your child.
4. **Prepare your child for the first day.** Tell your child about the daily routine and help them make a mental movie of the day. Consider including Jesus in the movie. For example, the mental movie may start with a short prayer in the car as your child is getting dropped off at school.
5. **Don't try to fix their fears.** If your child feels nervous about going to school, don't minimize or try to fix their feelings. This may cause them to think their feelings aren't acceptable. Instead, acknowledge your child's feelings and let them know they are normal. This also models God's acceptance of their feelings.
6. **Make goodbye easy.** When you drop off your child, don't draw it out. Try to keep your goodbye short and simple. Also, don't talk about how much you will miss your child.

7. **Start getting into a routine.** Sometimes structure falls out of place during the summertime, so you can prepare your child for school by implementing a regular bedtime and other routine habits, such as bedtime prayer.

8. **Give your child choices.** Not going to school isn't an option, but you can still give them a sense of control with other choices. For example, you can let them choose some of the foods in their lunch box.

9. **Play it out.** Use dolls and toys to tell a story about going to school. This can be done in a few minutes before bed for a week or two before school starts, and it will help your child know what to anticipate and establish predictability. Consider including Jesus as a helper in the story. For example, if you know that your child is nervous about lunchtime, the story can be used to tell the child the Holy Spirit is with her during lunchtime to encourage her.

10. **Ask the teacher for help.** If your child has trouble adjusting to school, don't hesitate to talk to your child's teacher for extra support and assistance.

Most children will weather the transition of going back to school just fine, but some may have prolonged difficulties. If your child continues to struggle after the first few weeks of school, consider talking with a professional about it. For more information about how to help your child adjust to school, contact San Diego Center for Play Therapy at www.sdplay.org or (858) 675-9600 ext. 1.