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The ABCs of Going to a New School

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Transitioning to a new school can be hard. It doesn't matter if you've moved to a new town or if your student has graduated from his/her current school and is moving up to the next school. Starting at a new school can be a stressful time for both you and your student. Here are a few tips that can help ease the transition for both of you.



- **Admit** that changing schools can be stressful and upsetting. Change is hard and requires many adjustments along the way. Your child may start behaving in ways he/she never has before. Be patient and allow time for your child to adapt to his/her new school environment.
- **Assure** your child that this new transition will be positive. Have you ever heard of the "self-fulfilling prophecy"? It occurs when what you believe might happen actually happens! When changing schools, a positive attitude is important – not only for your child, but for you as well. Children are perceptive. They can pick up on your emotions and attitudes about situations. Allow your child to discuss the things that worry him/her about the transition to a new school, but keep your fears and concerns out of the conversation. Instead, try to focus on the positive opportunities that going to the new school will provide.
- **Arrange** a visit to the new school. Try to meet the people your child will interact with (e.g., his/her teacher, principal, librarian, etc.) and see the places where your child will spend time (e.g., the classroom, playground, bathroom, etc.). The more your child knows about his/her new school and the people in it, the less he/she has to fear about the unknown. Therefore, your child will be more comfortable and confident on his/her first day.



- **Balance** physical and emotional needs. A well-rested child can handle stress better than a child who is worn out or sleepy. School-age children need 9-12 hours of sleep every night. Don't wait until the last minute to start your child's new sleep schedule – your child should switch to his/her new sleep schedule several weeks before it is necessary, in order to get used to it. Other ideas for improving sleep include getting plenty of exercise during the day (but not immediately before bedtime), putting electronic devices away a couple hours before bedtime, avoiding caffeine, and establishing a bedtime routine.
- **Build** routines to get your child excited about going to his/her new school. Incorporating routines used at your child's previous school will help the new school seem more familiar and comfortable. Routines can include taking a photo on the first day of school, eating a special breakfast, doing a morning cheer, or anything that gets your child energized and excited about his/her school day.
- **Breathe.** When the first day at your child's new school finally rolls around, things can get pretty hectic very quickly. To ensure this doesn't happen, start preparing the night before. Make sure your child knows his/her morning schedule. Have lunches made and backpacks packed and waiting by the door. Have your child set his/her clothes out too. Getting things ready the night before allows your child to have plenty of time to wake up, eat a healthy breakfast, and breathe before setting out on the new adventure.



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- **Connect** with other parents and students. Encourage (but don't force) your child to participate in after-school clubs or sports. Being a part of a team or social group can help your child bond with other children who have similar interests and can make your child feel more a part of his/her new school. Parents can connect with other parents, teachers, and staff by volunteering or joining the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). Making meaningful connections with other adults can offer you support.
- **Check** with your child's teachers and/or counselors if your child continues to struggle. Most teachers and school guidance counselors have already helped many children through difficult transitions! They might have some strategies or other "tricks up their sleeve" (such as pairing your child with a "buddy"), that will make your child's transition to his/her new school a little smoother.
- **Communicate.** Keep the lines of communication open. By doing this, you will be able to determine how your child's transition is going and where he/she is struggling. Allow your child to share his/her feelings openly and honestly. Listen to your child and don't try to minimize anything said just because you may not think it is a big deal. If your child has a difficult time opening up about the transition, try doing a quiet activity together (such as taking a walk or playing a card game) to give him/her an opportunity to talk.



Change is hard and it will take time for you and your child to get settled into a new school and a new routine. But with patience and perseverance, after a while, you will be looking back and smiling because you made it through!

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