



## How to adapt to a new school/year

*"But plants grow again," She murmured, focusing on the verdant beauty around her. "They put down new roots, create room for themselves in foreign soil." - Nalini Singh.*

Starting at a new school or even moving from one grade to the next can, at first, be a rather daunting experience for a child. Your child may be worried about fitting in, making new friends and/or managing the academic demands. The anticipation may be making them feel irritable, short-tempered and even physically ill. Here are a few points to help your children find their feet when they have been bumped out of their comfort zone.

1. Check your own anxiety: Parents often project their own anxiety about change onto their children which only serves to further exasperate the situation. It is therefore important that your own anxieties about change are reigned in. If you happen to feel very anxious feel free to express your emotions to your child provided you also ensure that you are actively working towards resolving this emotion by focusing on the positive aspects and promoting excitement about the new opportunities that lie ahead.
2. Don't dismiss their worries: it is important that you empathise with your child about the possible "what if's" that may be running through their head. Perhaps they are concerned that they may not be able to make a friend, or that the work may be too hard for them or that they are not going to fit in. It is sometimes easy to dismiss these worries as irrational or ramble off a cliché of sorts to ease their minds – but that offers them very little comfort. Rather focus on practical solutions to empower them. If they are worried about the school work suggest that you will be prepared to organise extra tutoring or if they are worried about fitting in remind them of strategies that they could use to promote contact such as finding something that they may have in common with someone else or encouraging them to try out for a sports team.
3. Get your ducks in a row: Smoothing out any potential and unnecessary complications helps to keep the anxiety levels low. Familiarise your child as much as possible with the school's expectations and culture by visiting the website, visiting the school beforehand and paging through previous yearbooks. Make sure that all the communication regarding school rules, the uniform, bell times *etc.* is read and understood so that any embarrassment can be avoided. Little things like making sure that they are on time in the mornings or having the right stationery goes a long way in helping them feel more settled.
4. Encourage social interactions: Get involved with other parents at the school by attending parent meetings, joining the PTA or volunteering as a class parent. Encourage your child to do the same by signing up for extra-curricular activities or inviting friends over.

5. Embrace change: Change is inevitable and transitioning from one grade to the next or to a new school serves as an exercise in teaching them how to navigate their way in uncertain circumstances. By exposing your children to new situations they are in a better position to improve their degree of adaptability. By offering your support and encouragement, your children will be able to experiment with strategies that will serve them well when they come across unfamiliar situations in the future.
6. Be patient: Settling in takes longer for some than others. It is only natural that some parents may feel guilty about their decision to move their child to a new school and it may begin to seem as if your efforts have been futile ... remind yourself and your child to be patient. If it does however appear as though they are experiencing severe anxiety or signs of school refusal, it may be a good time to ask your child's teacher for additional support or contact a professional to assist your child with the transition.

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