

Coping With the Stress of a New School

The Stress of a New School

For every child, the new school year is a new beginning. For some children, the start of a new school year will be in a new school. This can be a stressful situation.

Children in lower grades seem to adjust more easily, perhaps because they remain fairly dependent on their families. Teenagers, who can be especially vulnerable to being uprooted, may feel a loss of identity when leaving their peers.

It is important to recognize signs of problems and to know how to make starting a new school as easy as possible.

How to Decrease Stress of Starting a New School

To help your child adjust to a new school in a new city or within your school district, or adjust to the change to middle school or high school, try the following suggestions.

- Have your child's school records transferred well before the first day. If possible, get a copy of the records and bring them when you register your child.
- If your child has special education needs, arrange a meeting with the proper school personnel at the new school. This way any needed arrangements and placement can be made.
- If possible, visit the new school with your child before the first day. Seeing the inside of the school and knowing where rooms are may help reduce any anxiety. If you have children in middle or grade school, you may want to make an informal conference with teachers or counselors.

This may be helpful, especially when followed up by another conference a month later to make sure everything is going well. It is also helpful if the counselor can let your student know his or her door is always open, whether to just talk or to help with specific problems.
- An older child may benefit from looking at some of the textbooks used by the new school. Make sure your child is properly placed in the new school and that classroom expectations are realistic.

If your child was in advanced classes in the old school, find out specifics of the advanced classes in the new school.
- After you move, encourage your child to keep in touch with old friends.
- Enroll your child in youth activities or programs that also include new students. Be sure not to push your child into activities he or she does not want to do. Let him or her help choose which activity to try.

- Let your child worry and express his or her anxieties and feeling about school. When listening to your child, affirm his or her feelings by saying “I understand your concerns, let’s think of ways we can make things easier.”

If your child is unhappy, seems to dread school, or fakes illness, it is a sign of trouble. Letting your child stay home will not help the adjustment.

- Let your child express his or her fears and emotions.
- Work with the school’s teachers, principal or counselor to find out how to make the adjustment smooth.
- Talk with your health care provider if your child has physical signs of stress.