

5 Tips to Help Children Adjust to School

1. **Predicting Routine:** Use a technique called structured doll (SD) play to help children adjust to going to school. By using SD, children (ages 2-7) can see the change in routine by using story-telling in action (reference: Bratton, S., Kellum, T., & Landreth, G., 2005).

How to do SD Play?

- a. Create and act out a story about the first day of school with all the people involved so your child will see from the beginning of the day to the time you pick him/her up.
 - b. Be sure to incorporate a clear message (e.g. Mom/Dad will be here in the car after Music time to pick (child's name) up). Your intent is to let the child SEE that you will return to get them at the end of the day.
 - c. Get props (dolls, puppets, animals, cars, items that can represent home, school, etc.)
 - d. Tell the story. Make sure to use your child's name when referring to the doll, do not use "you" and/or "I". For example: "Daddy (parent) will get Sarah (child's name) breakfast".
 - e. Be animated in the story and try to incorporate sound effects. You can start the story by saying: "I've got a special story to tell you tonight. It's about a little girl name Sarah who goes to school (insert school's name). To tell the story we need a Sarah doll, a Mommy doll, a Daddy doll, and a Jane (teacher name) doll. Can you help me pick out a doll (puppet, stuffed animal) for each character?"
 - f. Remember to only include the elements in the story that you have control over or that you know for sure will happen.
2. **Celebrate the Day:** Sometimes it can help to have a pre and post celebration of their special day (i.e., the first day of school). Some examples of pre-celebration include a special breakfast, picking out an outfit, getting an alarm clock, etc. Some examples of post-celebration include doing a favorite activity, having a special dessert, an "I did" celebration party, play time with a friend, etc.
 3. **Transitional Specials:** It can sometimes be helpful to have a transitional object that the child can safely (and with permission) bring to school, such as a (1) a "confidence" button (i.e., button you sew on their shirt they can touch if they feel scared), (2) note written by a loved one or stuffed animal, (3) "kissing" rock (i.e., small rock they can keep in their pocket or back pack that parent(s) have kissed for well-wishes), etc.
 4. **Reflection of Feelings:** Be sure to reflect the feeling you see your child experiencing. It can help children know you understand their experience and can help establish a better sense of coping long-term by modeling an emotional vocabulary.
 5. **Affection:** Be sure to give children a hug and verbal reassurance that this will be a great day!

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