

Preparing Your Child Emotionally for the Return to School

A new school year can bring more than one feeling. A child may feel excited, nervous, curious, or sad at the same time. These mixed feelings are common. The goal is not to remove every worry. It is to help your child feel understood and prepared.

Listen before you try to solve the problem. Ask, “What part of going back feels hardest?” Your child may worry about a new teacher, finding the classroom, schoolwork, friends, lunch, or being away from home. A specific worry is easier to plan for than a general “I do not want to go.”

Make the unknown more predictable. Visit the school or look at pictures when possible. Review the route, drop-off plan, daily schedule, and who can help. Remind your child that teachers expect some students to feel nervous at the start of school.

Practice one manageable step. Pack the backpack, choose clothes, rehearse the morning, or walk to the entrance. Let your child help make the plan. Small practice gives your child something familiar to follow.

Use calm and honest words. Do not promise that nothing difficult will happen. Try, “You may feel nervous, and we have a plan.” Keep home routines steady and identify one trusted adult at school your child can contact.

Watch what happens over time. One difficult morning does not always mean there is a serious problem. However, talk with your child’s doctor and school support team when worry does not improve, gets worse, or interferes with sleep, school attendance, friendships, or usual activities.

Did You Know?

- ✓ The American Academy of Pediatrics says visiting or rehearsing a new school setting can help children feel more comfortable before the first day.¹
- ✓ The American Academy of Pediatrics explains that ordinary worry may need added support when it interferes with sleeping, playing, or going to school.²
- ✓ Harvard identifies a stable, supportive adult relationship as an important source of protection during stress, and the CDC recommends stronger coordination among parents, schools, and health professionals during back-to-school planning.^{3,4}

Research Sources

1. American Academy of Pediatrics. [“Back-to-School Tips for Families.”](#) HealthyChildren.org. Updated August 5, 2024.
2. American Academy of Pediatrics. [“Help Your Child Manage Anxiety: Tips for Home & School.”](#) HealthyChildren.org. Updated September 24, 2024.
3. Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. [“Three Principles to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families.”](#)
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [“Emotional Well-Being of Children Studied.”](#) National Syndromic Surveillance Program. January 12, 2026.

Emotional Readiness Check-In

Use this page before school begins or when worries appear. Listen first, identify the specific concern, and choose one small preparation or support step.

Child's name: _____	Date: _____
School or grade: _____	First day: _____

- 1. Name the Feelings**
 Ask: "How are you feeling about going back to school?" More than one feeling is allowed.
- 2. Find the Specific Worry**
 Ask: "What part feels hardest?" Listen before giving advice or reassurance.
 The specific worry: _____
- 3. Make School More Predictable**
 Review what will happen, where your child will go, and who can help.
 What my child already knows: _____
 What we still need to learn: _____
- 4. Practice One Manageable Step**
 Choose one small action, such as packing, rehearsing the morning, visiting, or walking to the entrance.
 Our practice step: _____
- 5. Identify Support and Check Again**
 Name a trusted adult at school. Contact the child's doctor or school team if worry continues or disrupts usual activities.
 Trusted school adult: _____
 Next check-in date or support step: _____