

Back to School Tips from Understood.org

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5 Tips for Calming First-Day Jitters in Elementary School

Summertime is often a much-needed break from the demands and stresses of school. So when grade-schoolers have to head [back to school](#), they may be especially nervous. You may not be able to remove all the [anxiety](#). But there are ways you can help calm your grade-schooler's first-day jitters.

Focus on feelings.

Young kids don't always have the words to express their emotions. And certain learning and attention issues can make it even more difficult. What you might get from your child instead of conversation is acting out or being cranky.

Give your child opportunities to talk by saying things like, "You seem to be very grumpy lately, and that's not like you. Are you thinking about the first day of school?" or "Going back to school can be scary. Is there something you're worried about?" Explore other [questions to ask to get your child talking about school](#).

Go over the class list.

Schools don't always like to give them out, but ask if you can get your child's class list before the start of school. Even if it's the day before, looking at the list takes away at least one piece of uncertainty.

If there are kids she likes in her class, she may look forward to seeing them. If there are kids she doesn't like or has a hard time with, you can brainstorm ways of dealing with them to give her some control over the situation.

Go through the drill.

Most kids don't look forward to switching gears from summer mode to school mode. But for kids with certain learning and attention issues, that [shift can cause even more](#)

anxiety. Walking through the new daily routine in advance can help, even if it's the same as last year's.

Go over the morning drill—what time she needs to get up, when you'll leave the house, where and when the bus will arrive. Do the same with the afternoon schedule—when school ends, who will pick her up at the bus stop, when she'll do homework. Factor in afterschool activities, too. And if possible, schedule a school visit before the new year begins. This way your child can get used to the layout of the school and classroom ahead of time.

Practice first-day interactions.

The first day of school means lots of conversation. For kids who struggle with social skills, that can be very difficult—and stressful.

Discuss and rehearse conversations you know your child will have with other kids and the teacher. Give her words to say when introducing herself: “Hi. I heard you were in my class. How was your summer?” and “Hi. I'm Annie. Art is my favorite class. Will we get to do pottery this year?” Practice how to greet a familiar face, too: “It's great to see you! I think we're in the same class. I'm glad.”

Talk about the teacher.

Kids who struggle with behavior may have another concern about walking into the classroom on the first day of school: *What if the teacher doesn't like me, or is mean?*

Reassure her that the teacher is there to help her learn and understands that sometimes she may need extra support. Explain that you and the teacher will work together to make sure she gets the help she needs. Having your child meet the teacher ahead of time can also help your child feel more comfortable.

Explain how school will support her.

If your child has an IEP, a 504 plan or informal classroom supports, explain how these work to help her at school. For instance: “You'll have a little more time to complete the writing assignments and you can do them in a quiet room.”

Also tell her that there are plenty of people she can go to if she needs a hand. That might be a counselor, case manager, nurse or other staff people. If your child has a “go-to” person—maybe someone who helped her a lot last year—try to meet with that person before school starts. That can remind your child she has a support system in place.

5 Tips for Calming First-Day Jitters in High School

Teens aren't always eager to share all their worries with their parents. Just because they haven't *said* anything doesn't mean they don't have any worries as they approach the [start of the school year](#). High school can be a [very stressful time](#), especially for struggling students.

[Demanding academics](#), [more responsibilities to juggle](#), a confusing [social scene](#), and [college](#) and [career](#) on the horizon—there's a lot to deal with. If your teen isn't open about her feelings, be on the lookout for [signs of anxiety](#), and try these tips to calm first-day jitters in high school.

Make sure his schedule is correct.

Sometimes schools make mistakes as they schedule classes for students. An unexpected mix-up can heighten first-week anxiety. Suggest your child look over his schedule ahead of time, or do it together, so there are no surprises. That also allows him to have his schedule corrected as early as possible.

Talk about non-school commitments.

Sometimes high-schoolers bite off more than they can chew in terms of activities and part-time jobs. Ask whether he thinks he'll be able to juggle all the activities he's involved in, along with schoolwork. If it's just too much, ask which one he'd choose to drop for right now. Doing it before the school year starts will save a lot of stress in the long run.

Read how to [help your high-schooler find the right mix of activities and classes](#).

Remind him of the support he has.

Your high-schooler might feel like he's suddenly on his own when it comes to staying on top of schoolwork. But while he's expected to take on more responsibility, there are a number of people he can turn to for help.

Encourage him to self-advocate with teachers and case managers, and to speak up before things get way off track or he feels totally lost or overwhelmed. Remind him that he can always come to you, too.

Help relieve fears about the future.

As kids progress through high school, the prospect of college, work or a combination of the two looms large. So do tests like the ACT and SAT. Assure your child there are many paths students take after high school, and that you'll help him explore ones that are right for him. If he has an IEP, remind him that together you'll work with the school to plan for a smooth transition to life after school.

Be sensitive to social pressures.

Your teen may not tell you outright that he's nervous about social situations. But if you know what his past experiences have been, you can try to open the door to discussion.

You might say something like, "The high school is so much bigger than middle school. Are you afraid you won't know people in your classes?" Or, "You haven't seen Emily since you broke up this summer. Are you worried about running into her at school?" Find out what to do if he gives you the silent treatment. And learn more about why your teen may be frustrated about school—and what you can say to help.