

# Back to School

## Transitioning Back to School

The return to school can be exciting for some children and daunting for others. Often times, the underlying cause of anxiety, worry or fear is uncertainty.

## Preparing Your Child for the Transition

- Establish/reinstate routines at least one week before school. Support your child to complete each step of the routine. Consider incorporating calming activities into the routine like reading a book.
- Time is an abstract concept to many children. A weekly schedule or calendar can be used to illustrate how many days there are until school returns. This will prepare the child for the upcoming transition.
- If your child is attending school for the first time, show them photos of the campus or arrange a visit prior to the first day. If possible, have your child meet the teacher in advance. This will provide the child with a sense of predictability.
- Drive to school on the holidays and have your child practice getting out of the car at the new drop off/pick up point. This will familiarise your child with the new routine.
- Speak to the teacher ahead of time to discuss what the first day will involve. This information can be passed on to your child verbally or in the form of a social story. A social story is a narrative that illustrates certain situations and outlines events.
- Allowing your child to select a new lunchbox, pencil case, or even a new hairstyle for school can be a great way to motivate them for the first day.
- Have a picnic at home to practice opening lunchboxes and drink bottles.
- If your child has complex sensory preferences, they may find certain fabrics, tags or collars uncomfortable. Have your child try on their uniform in advance. Make the necessary amendments to ensure your child is as comfortable as possible e.g., Remove clothing tags, cover rough seams, trial a singlet underneath the polo shirt.
- Ensure your child has all the necessary books and stationary items for school.
- Watch cartoons and read books about going to school. Have positive discussions about school in preparation for the first day.
- Support your child to reconnect with classmates over the holidays by organising play dates. Often times, the child will look forward to seeing the students on the first day.
- Casually ask your child how they are feeling about going back to school. Avoid asking direct questions that suggest the child should be feeling anxious (e.g., "Are you feeling worried about having a new teacher this year?"). Acknowledge and validate your child's emotions and talk through any fears or worries. Discuss ways in which your child can change/handle these situations.





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### Tips For the First Day of School

- Prepare your child's recess and lunch the night before school. Allow extra time for your child to get ready and have breakfast on the first day of school. Rushing to leave the house can trigger additional anxiety.
- Schedules or checklists are a great way to support your child with morning routines. Written text, objects, or pictures can be used to represent each step in the routine. This will support your child to recall important steps in their routine and organise their planning/thinking.
- Talk positively and calmly about the day ahead on the drive to school. Reassure your child that you will come back to collect them at the end of the day.
- Prolonged goodbyes can be challenging and create additional anxiety for both the parent and child. Once your child is settled, say a quick goodbye and transition away. Avoid sneaking away without your child noticing. A sudden disappearance may make your child feel unsafe.
- If you think your child will have challenges separating from you, inform the school in advance. Arrange for a staff member to greet and engage the child as soon as they arrive at school. Redirect the child to an activity or give them a role while they wait for class to begin (e.g., "Let's carry the blocks to the mat").
- If your child is particularly anxious about the first day, allow them to bring a comfort object along. Comfort objects can provide a sense of security in new and unfamiliar environments. Ensure the object is placed in your child's bag once they arrive at school so that it doesn't get lost.
- Resist the urge to visit the school/check on your child throughout the day. Your child may assume that you will do this every day. Maybe discuss if there is a check in system that the school can arrange through the teacher or admin.
- The transition back to school can be tiring for most children. Limit after-school and extra-curricular activities during the first week of school.
- Ensure you are on time for school collection. Congratulate your child for completing their first day and reinforce the idea that you came back (just like you said you would!).

