

Easy Ways To Survive The First Day

Tears, tantrums and anxiety... and that's just you. Here's how to prepare your child (and yourself) for that emotion-filled moment

By **DR NICOLA J DAVIES**

It's the first day of kindergarten or primary school. Your beloved child is leaving the protective shelter you have meticulously created for her. As much as you want her to be

independent, you can't help but feel anxious. It doesn't help that she too might be experiencing separation anxiety. It's natural your protective instinct sets in and you start to get a

knot in your stomach. No one can predict how events will unfold over those first few mornings, but here are a few tips for coping with this momentous transition.

SOOTHING THEIR ANXIETIES

	SITUATION	TIP
Talk Time	As the first day of school approaches, your child might show signs of not wanting to leave the security you have created for her.	At least two to three weeks in advance, start to prepare by enthusiastically counting down the days on the calendar. If your child returns the excitement, show her how proud you are with hugs and kisses. If there is no reaction, or a negative one, don't force the issue. Instead, provide reassurance and move on. It is important that your child anticipates what's lying ahead with excitement rather than fear.
Start Rehearsing	Some children will experience separation anxiety when they see their dear mother leaving from the school gate.	Rehearse the events of the first day of school beforehand in order to get a sense of how your child will deal with it. Leave her with a trusted relative or friend, talking about it with your child first. On the morning of rehearsal, let her know that Mummy's going to be away for a while, that she is safe, and that Mum will pick her up later. These are the same reassuring words your child will hear on the first day of school.
Token Comfort	Before leaving the house that morning, your child might refuse to get dressed or leave the house.	Ask your child if he would like to take a treasured toy, sticker or photo with him. Make suggestions, but let him choose. This type of token serves as a comforting reminder of your protective presence, leaving your child with a sense of security.
Familiarise	In the classroom or at the school gate, your child might start to cry or refuse to let go of your hand.	If possible, and with the permission of teachers, help your child become familiar with the environment. Introduce him to the teacher and some of the other children (orientation is a good time for this). Take your child by the hand and show him around the classroom. It's important to take your time and not rush. Your familiarity with the school will help to settle your child's anxiety about being in an unfamiliar environment.
Let Go	It's time to leave, but your child is crying and you can't bring yourself to walk away.	Make your departure short, don't linger, and don't return to see if she's okay. It's not a good idea to try slipping away unnoticed either. Reassure your child that you'll be back later and make sure that you're not late when collecting her. Let her see you smile, as a worried expression on Mummy's face will unsettle her further.

*Dr Nicola Davies is a Doctor of Health Psychology, with expertise in human behaviour.



How To Stay In Control...

1 Accept that it's normal to find the first day of school stressful. It's a mistake to get upset or to express anger towards your child. Instead, share your fears and concerns with friends, family or even a counsellor before the event.

2 Get to know the teacher you are trusting your child with by contacting her and sharing any concerns you might have. They will appreciate this, and the friendly, cooperative attitude will put you in a reassured mood, which your child will notice.

3 Don't overdo the reunion when you collect your child. Let him know how proud you are, ask about his day, and give him your undivided attention for the next few hours. Be sure not to have any meetings, appointments or tasks scheduled. Enjoy having your precious child back with you!

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Real Mums Share How They Deal With First-Day Dramas

For kindergarten, we took the kids to orientation. I tried to find out who the form teacher was and have her spend some individual time with my boys. Then, at home, I'd reinforce the idea about how nice Mrs X was and how much fun he would have at school with Mrs X. We also read books on going to school and talked about the experience before the term started.

– **Jenny Teo, 36, mother of two**

It's important to trust the teachers, and if they offer to take the child, we can be assuring yet firm and say, "Mummy will be here to meet you later." A hug can be dangerous as they may not let go and burst into tears. Preschoolers are easily distracted, so they'll be fine! – Tracey Yeo, 40, mother of three