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Pirates Don't Go To Kindergarten!

How to Help Your Child with the Transition to Kindergarten & Beyond

Most children are excited about going to kindergarten and other grades. At the same time, it's normal for children to have jitters and feel nervous about a new school and teacher. It's *also* normal for parents to have worries and concerns! Here are some tips for easing the transition:

TAKE A DEEP BREATH. Parents have many feelings about this transition and it's important to attend to them, too. Use stress management techniques—breathing, meditation, exercise—to alleviate any anxiety you may be feeling so you can be positive and affirming to your child about this upcoming experience.

VISIT the new school or classroom if you can. Familiarize your child with the building, their classroom, the bathrooms, and the playground. If possible, meet the new teacher. Ask the school if they can give you a schedule of a typical school day; review it with your child.

MEET other students. See if you can arrange a playdate with fellow students. Some schools arrange a group playdate for incoming kindergarteners.

VALIDATE FEELINGS. Although you know it will be okay, validate your child's feelings as real and appropriate. Do not brush off concerns. You can tell them you know it will be fine while also giving them the space to express fears. (Lots of kids feel afraid or worried, and that's okay).

READ books about going to kindergarten. There are a lot of back-to-school books out there! Read to your child and take it slow—make sure to leave room for your child to ask questions and express concerns. Make observations about the characters and ask what your child thinks the characters are feeling or thinking. Sometimes talking about storybook characters rather than themselves allows children to express feelings more openly.

ROLE-PLAY school situations. Playing with stuffed animals or dolls is another way to talk about feelings. Many children enjoy playing out a back-to-school scenario. You can initiate a play session by starting a scene—by saying, for example, *Bunny's going to her first day of kindergarten. I wonder what she's feeling*—and then seeing how your child responds. Once you've introduced the scene, let the child direct the storytelling. Sometimes children have concerns that are different from what we expect, and an open-ended strategy allows for those to come out. If children don't want to role-play, try drawing or making up a story instead.

TALK TO EXPERTS. If your child has an older sibling or a friend who can describe their kindergarten experience in a positive way, seek them out and ask them to talk about it with your child.

LISA ROBINSON is a practicing child and adult psychiatrist, and psychotherapist, and the author of the picture book **Pirates Don't Go To Kindergarten**, illustrated by Eda Kaban and published by Two Lions.