Calming First Day Kindergarten Anxiety

Tips and ideas to ease kindergarten jitters and fears

It’s understandable for children to experience first day kindergarten anxiety. Imagine what it must be like to suddenly leave the familiar comfort of home and be dropped into a new environment where everything and everyone is different.

There are new routines and new expectations, and Mom and Dad are not around to reassure you and make you feel better. No wonder the first few days of kindergarten can be fraught with tears and trauma for many children.

But there are ways parents and teachers can ease children into kindergarten and help alleviate fears and anxiety in the first days of kindergarten. Here are some great tips and strategies to keep in mind for your child’s first days of kindergarten:

**Downplay the milestone.** Ratcheting up expectations and highlighting the first day of kindergarten as a really big deal with a capital "D" is likely to backfire if all the fuss makes your child more nervous than he already is.

Instead, try to compare kindergarten to something he is already familiar with, such as preschool or even a kids’ music class he may have enjoyed. Explain that kindergarten will be a place where he will make friends and have fun, just like he may have done with groups of kids before. And as tempting as it might be to record your child’s first day at kindergarten, do leave the video camera at home.

**Connect school to home.** Some schools arrange for teachers to meet with students before school starts. Talk to your child’s school about arranging a visit before the first day of kindergarten.
Some teachers also ask parents to send in a family photo to be posted in the classroom to help kids feel more connected to their home life while at school. Similarly, having a copy of the daily activities schedule and talking to your child about his day at school can help bring school into the home.

**Read a book together about starting school.** Reading about other children who might have fears and anxiety about starting school may be comforting to kids who are experiencing the same feelings. Elizabeth Kennedy, About.com’s Guide to Children’s Books, has compiled an excellent list of books about starting school.

**Try to minimize your own anxiety.** Just as it’s perfectly normal for your child to feel some anxiety on the first days of kindergarten, it’s absolutely normal for you to feel anxious when you see your child upset. And it’s also understandable that you may experience some frustration when you see other children playing happily and your child is still clinging to your legs for dear life.

But here is the most important thing for you to remember: Your child will adjust to his new classroom eventually. It may take some kids a bit longer than others, but the fact is that it will happen, especially if you respond with understanding and patience and keep your eyes on the prize: a happy child who loves going to school and seeing his friends (it will happen!).

**Don’t stay too long.** Reassure your child that you will be back and say a quick goodbye. Lingering will only make it more difficult for your child to see you go, and she will cry harder the next time because she will see that it’s an effective way to get you to stay. As wrenching as it may be for you to walk away while your child is crying, chances are that she will be playing happily soon after you are out of sight. But don’t sneak out as this may undermine your child’s trust and could worsen separation anxiety.

**Identify his anxiety.** What exactly is he afraid of? Talk to your child and find out what he is worried about. Is he concerned that you won’t return? Is he afraid that someone will be mean to him? Or that he won’t know where the bathroom is or that he won’t know what he’s supposed to do? Once you establish what his specific fears are you will be better able to address his concerns and work with your child and his teacher to find ways to handle them.

**Have faith in the teachers.** Your child will hardly be the only one in the classroom who experiences separation anxiety, nor will he be the first one the teachers have had to comfort after mom, dad, or a caregiver are gone. Experienced teachers will be ready with morning routines, songs, games, and other fun activities to get your child into the swing of things while she adjusts to her new surroundings.

**Send along a favorite comfort object.** If your child has a favorite lovey, ask your child’s teacher if you can send it along. Most schools have a policy of allowing kids to bring such objects to school but restrict them to cubbies or backpacks and only let kids take them out during rest time. In many cases, just having a favorite comfort object nearby can give kids a sense of security.
Don’t put a time limit on how long it should take. For some kids, first day kindergarten anxiety may not last beyond a few days if they happen at all. For others, tears and school fears may go on for weeks. Just as each child has his own individual set of experiences and personality and anxiety that may be influencing his feelings about starting school, the time it takes to adjust to school will vary from one child to another.

Before you know it, your reluctant kindergartener will look forward to seeing his friends at school and participating in the activities and games in class. Whether your child's kindergarten anxiety lasts a few days or a few months, it will be a phase she will go through as she grows into a confident grade-schooler.

[http://childparenting.about.com/od/schoollearning/a/first_day_kindergarten_anxiety.htm](http://childparenting.about.com/od/schoollearning/a/first_day_kindergarten_anxiety.htm)