

# Help for the **New Kid**

by Cassi Denari

**Y**our child walks into the crowded cafeteria and scans the room looking for an open table. Suddenly all eyes are on him. The huge room goes quiet. His peers have stopped mid-sentence, mid-bite to look, to stare at the new kid. Your child's face is flushed and his cheeks are turning bright red. It appears he may have forgotten how to breathe. No, this is not a nightmare. It's your child's first day at a new school.

Over 2 million families with children between the ages of 6 and 17 move around the United States every year, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. With those statistics, chances are your child is not the only new kid at school.

But being the new kid doesn't have to be quite so scary. With a few simple steps you can help your child be the new kid they want to be.



## **Get the Lay of the Land**

Before your child's first day, take an hour and visit the new school or get a tour. Find out where his classrooms are, his locker, the library, the gym, the cafeteria, the restrooms, etc. Becoming familiar with the layout and knowing what to expect can ease overall anxiety, including those first-day jitters. Bring a camera and take pictures (visual aids are always helpful) or go to the school's website and print a map of the school. The more familiar your child is with the school the better. Take some time walking around the campus and playing on the playground. Walk your child through what his schedule might look like and help him envision a typical day at his new school.

## **Meet the Players**

If there's time, meet the principal, the office staff, the classroom teachers and as many members of the faculty as possible who will be interacting with your child.

Contact the principal and see if he can suggest a student to be your child's "buddy" for the first day or two of school. This buddy can show your child the ropes and introduce him to other students. Dr. John Duffy, clinical psychologist and author of *The Available Parent: Radical Optimism for Raising Teens and Tweens*, says, "This helps your child become acclimated to the building, the culture and, to an extent, the social climate of the school." Contact the PTA president and ask if they have any information about the school or students that could make your child's transition into the new school easier.

## **Get Involved**

Once school starts, join the PTA, volunteer in the classroom and get involved any way you can. "Meeting other parents, kids and staff is the best way to help your child and your family transition and thrive in a new school," says Amy Hilbrich Davis, founder and CEO of Inspiring Moms ([inspiringmoms.com](http://inspiringmoms.com)). Also, find out if the school offers programs your child might find exciting such as theater, music, sports, etc.

## **Making Friends**

The key to making friends is to find a common interest. Help your child be open to finding that common ground. Talk to your child about a time when you were making new friends. Think back to what worked for you. Share any



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experiences that you think will be helpful for your child. Each child is going to have a different approach. Some are going to be fine walking right up to a peer or a group of kids and introducing themselves. For others this may be completely out of character.

## Talk About Feelings

Be patient. As with any transition there is a period of adjustment. Jenny Rogers, a kindergarten teacher and mother of two, says, "After you and your child have taken that school tour, talk about things that surprised them or ways that this school is like their old school. This often starts a good dialogue about worries and concerns, and it helps the child picture herself in this new school. As all great parents do, spin the 'worries' into positives!" Listen to your child. Validate her concerns. Offer up your own experiences and empathize. In some way or another, we've all been there.

## Sell It

"Your attitude as a parent is powerful! Be positive! Acknowledge that new can mean scary and create anxiety, yet it also means exciting, more friends and an improved life. If you, as the mom or dad, believe this, then so will your kids. Live the life you want your kids to live and jump in!" says Davis. And finally, remind your child that they're the cool, mysterious new kid and to have fun on this exciting new adventure. Trust your child to be successful. □



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