

The back-to-school reset guide

- ▣ The start of the school year can bring mixed emotions for children and parents. Dr Martha Deiros Collado, a psychologist with over 20 years' experience who specialises in family support, shares her tips to help parents prepare for their child's return to school.

These tips are designed to help you support your child's return to school in a way that feels manageable for your family, whether you try one, a few, or all of them.

▣ Build excitement together

As you prepare for your child going back to school, help them find things to look forward to. Chat about seeing friends, a favourite lesson, or feeling more grown-up as they move into a new year. If they're starting somewhere new, look at photos of the school together and talk about what will feel familiar and what will be different. This can make the unknown feel less daunting and a little more exciting.

▣ Focus on facts rather than predictions

When you talk about school, stick to facts, such as what time school starts or what the first day will look like, instead of guessing how your child will feel. When your child responds, listen first before you rush to reassure them or solve the problem. Often, children simply need you to listen. An open conversation can help you understand what they need and how best to support them.

▣ Build independence through simple choices

School is a space for children to build their confidence and grow. Try to nurture this by giving them small choices about their school kit for the new term. This might mean picking out something new if that works for your family, or it could be choosing which bag or shoes to wear from what you already have or deciding what to put in their pencil case. Even small choices like these give children a sense of control and can help them feel more excited about returning to school, while also building their confidence and independence.

▣ Ease back into school-time routine early

Children often need a little time to adjust after the summer holidays. Around a week before school starts, gradually reintroduce school-time bedtimes and wake-up times. You can also bring back familiar routines like preparing school bags or choosing clothes the night before. Starting early can make those first mornings much easier and help reduce tiredness after school.

□ Make the new routine feel familiar

Whether starting a new school, a new morning routine, or taking a different route to school, try to make time to practise your routine before term begins. Familiarity can help school feel less daunting. Try travelling the route they'll use on school days, whether that's walking, taking the bus, getting a lift, or a combination. Even talking through the journey together, or looking at pictures of the school or route beforehand, can help build familiarity if a full practice run isn't possible. This is also a good opportunity to talk to your child about the school drop off and pick-up. Clearly explain what their routine will look like, who'll be picking them up, or if they'll be attending after-school clubs. Many families' day-to-day looks different: writing this up in a clear and simple visual timetable can help children become familiar with their weekly routine. This allows children to understand what will soon become their new normal away from the pressure of the school run and the early mornings.

□ Making goodbyes easier

It's completely normal for some children to find goodbyes difficult, especially after spending more time together over the holidays. Help your child know what to expect by keeping your goodbye warm, predictable and brief. Having a consistent routine, such as a special hug, handshake or phrase, makes goodbyes feel more familiar and helps your child feel more secure.

If they're upset, let them know you understand how they're feeling, while calmly reassuring them that you'll see them again at the end of the school day.

□ Address anxieties ahead of time

Children might have specific worries about returning to school – such as what they're going to eat, using the bathroom, friendship groups or their new teachers. By acknowledging their feelings while showing your confidence that they can cope, you help them feel more safe and secure about the change.

Remember, the goal isn't to have the perfect response, but to help your child feel listened to. Here are a few simple swaps that can help make those conversations feel more open and supportive.

Instead of

Your teacher is really nice and you'll make loads of friends!

Try

You're moving up to year 3. Can you remember your teacher's name? Was it Miss Clare...? Who is in your class this year? Can you remember what you are going to be doing that's different to last year?

Instead of

Don't worry about school dinners – there will be lots to choose from!

Try

You'll be having school dinners. We can look at the menu together and choose foods you think you might like to try.

Instead of

Don't be sad – you'll be fine!

Try

I can see this feels hard right now. It's ok to feel sad when we say goodbye. I'll be thinking about you today, and I'll be back to pick you up after school.

□ **Make time to unwind after school**

You know your child best, and the school day can be tiring in different ways. When they get picked up, some children will need space to move and burn off energy, while others will need quiet time to decompress. Ten minutes in a park or with a favourite quiet activity – such as a book or fidget toys – can help their brains and bodies decompress after school. It doesn't need a special space – even a few minutes curled up on the sofa can help.

One thing that can help most children is having a small snack and a drink at pick-up, no matter what time it is. This can help them transition from school to home and give both their bodies and minds a chance to relax.

- By supporting your child in a way that works for your family, you can help them start the new school year feeling secure, confident and ready for the year ahead. Because school is about more than academic learning: it's a chance for your child to build independence, develop social skills, make friends, and feel part of a community where they can experience small successes and build resilience. Together, these experiences support your child's social, emotional and academic learning at school.