K12 ACADEMICS — SCHOOL TRANSITIONS SERIES

Adjusting to a New School

A parent's guide to the settling-in that follows any transition — how to help your child make friends, adjust academically and emotionally, and truly thrive in a new place.

K12 ACADEMICS

Find Your Community

2026 EDITION

ABOUT K12 ACADEMICS

The world's largest education resource.

Online since 2004, K12 Academics has helped millions of families, students and educators **find the right school, college, camp, business and program in their community** — for every kind of learner.

EVERY TRANSITION ENDS IN SETTLING IN

Whatever the reason for a new school — a move, a switch, a new grade — the real work is **settling in**: making friends, finding footing academically, and feeling like they belong. It takes time, and thoughtful support makes all the difference. This guide walks the settling-in process in **ten steps**.

General guidance. Every child adjusts at their own pace. This guide describes typical patterns and supports; if your child is struggling significantly or persistently, talk with their teacher, the school counselor, or a professional. In crisis, call or text 988.

1

STEP 01 OF 10

Expect an Adjustment Period

WHAT TO KNOW

First, set expectations: **adjusting to a new school takes time** — usually weeks to a full semester — and every child—s timeline differs. Early wobbles (nerves, loneliness, a rough day) are normal, not warning signs.

BY THE NUMBERS

Takes time	Varies	Wobbles = normal
weeks to a semester	every child differs	not alarming

HOW TO HELP

Go in expecting an **adjustment period**, so you can support your child with patience rather than panic when the first weeks feel bumpy.

GOOD TO KNOW

A hard first week is **normal** — judge the adjustment over weeks and months, not the first few days.

2

STEP 02 OF 10

Prepare Before Day One

WHAT TO KNOW

Reduce the unknowns in advance: **visit the school, meet the teacher, walk the route and layout, and talk through what the day will look like.** Familiarity is the biggest antidote to first-day anxiety.

BY THE NUMBERS

Visit & tour	Meet the teacher	Practice the routine
see it first	a friendly face	reduce unknowns

HOW TO HELP

Before the first day, **make the new school familiar** — tour it, meet the teacher if you can, and walk through the routine, so day one feels less like the unknown.

GOOD TO KNOW

The more your child **knows what to expect**, the calmer the first day — familiarity beats reassurance alone.

3

STEP 03 OF 10

Ease the First Days

WHAT TO KNOW

The first days set the tone. Aim for a **calm morning, a warm but brief goodbye, and one small connection** (a friendly peer, a helpful adult). Small early wins build momentum and confidence.

BY THE NUMBERS

Calm mornings	Brief goodbye	One connection
not rushed	confident & warm	a peer or adult

HOW TO HELP

Keep the first mornings **calm and positive**, say a confident short goodbye, and encourage your child to make **one small connection** — a first friend or a trusted adult.

WATCH OUT

A long, anxious goodbye makes it harder — a warm, confident "have a great day, see you after!" reassures more.

4

STEP 04 OF 10

Help Them Make Friends

WHAT TO KNOW

Friendship is the **#1 driver** of a good adjustment. The fastest route is **shared activities** — clubs, teams, arts — plus playdates for younger kids, and coaching on how to join in and connect.

BY THE NUMBERS

The top priority	Activities	Coach connection
friends = belonging	the fastest route	how to join in

HOW TO HELP

Actively help your child **connect**: encourage a club or team, arrange playdates for younger kids, and coach simple ways to start conversations and join a group.

GOOD TO KNOW

Joining **one activity** is the single most effective way to make friends at a new school — prioritize it early.

5

STEP 05 OF 10

Support the Academic Transition

WHAT TO KNOW

A new school often means a **different curriculum, pace, and expectations**. Your child may need to catch up in spots, or be under-challenged in others. Stay in touch with teachers to smooth it out.

BY THE NUMBERS

Different pace	Gaps or overlaps	Talk to teachers
+ curriculum	normal	fill the gaps

HOW TO HELP

Communicate early with the **new teachers** about where your child stands, and support any catch-up (or ask for challenge if they're ahead) during the settling-in weeks.

GOOD TO KNOW

Academic wobbles right after a move are usually **transition, not trouble** — a little teacher coordination sorts most of it out.

6

STEP 06 OF 10

Support the Emotional Side

WHAT TO KNOW

A new school stirs real feelings: **grief for the old, anxiety about the new, loneliness, and sometimes anger**. Validating these — rather than rushing past them — is what helps kids move through and settle.

BY THE NUMBERS

Real feelings	Validate	Listen
grief, anxiety, loneliness	don't dismiss	more than fix

HOW TO HELP

Acknowledge and validate your child's feelings about the change, listen more than you fix, and reassure them that it gets easier — because it does.

GOOD TO KNOW

"You'll be fine" skips the feeling; "this is really hard, and it will get easier" helps far more.

7

STEP 07 OF 10

Build the Home-School Connection

WHAT TO KNOW

You and the new school are a **team**. Introduce yourself to teachers and the counselor, share what helps your child, stay in touch, and get involved — a strong home-school link catches issues early and helps kids belong.

BY THE NUMBERS

Meet the team	Share what helps	Get involved
teachers + counselor	about your child	builds belonging

HOW TO HELP

Connect with the **teachers and counselor** early, tell them about your child, and stay in touch — a strong partnership smooths the adjustment and flags any trouble fast.

GOOD TO KNOW

The **counselor** is a key ally for a new student — introduce your child (and yourself) early.

8

STEP 08 OF 10

Establish Grounding Routines

WHAT TO KNOW

Amid change, **routines create stability**. Consistent sleep, calm mornings, a homework rhythm, and predictable family time give a child solid ground while everything else feels new.

BY THE NUMBERS

Consistent sleep	Calm mornings	Predictable
the foundation	+ homework rhythm	stability in change

HOW TO HELP

Keep **steady routines** — sleep, mornings, homework, family time — so your child has a stable base to return to while adjusting to the new school.

GOOD TO KNOW

When school is all new, **predictable home routines** are grounding — protect sleep and rhythm especially.

9

STEP 09 OF 10

Watch for Trouble

WHAT TO KNOW

Most kids settle, but watch for signs they're **not**: persistent unhappiness or withdrawal, ongoing physical complaints (stomachaches, headaches) before school, school avoidance, no friends after months, or signs of bullying.

BY THE NUMBERS

Persistent sadness	Physical complaints	Avoidance/no friends
+ withdrawal	before school	after months

HOW TO HELP

If your child **isn't settling after a reasonable time** — still unhappy, avoiding school, friendless, or showing physical symptoms — loop in the counselor and look into why.

WATCH OUT

Ongoing stomachaches before school, school refusal, or persistent loneliness are **signals to act** — not just phases to wait out. See our Wellbeing and Bullying guides; crisis: 988.

10 STEP 10 OF 10

Give It Time & Trust the Process

WHAT TO KNOW

Most children settle well within a **semester** with support and patience. Celebrate small signs of progress — a new friend, a good day, growing comfort — and trust that resilience is being built along the way.

BY THE NUMBERS

~a semester	Celebrate progress	Resilience
to truly settle	small wins count	grows through it

HOW TO HELP

Be **patient and encouraging**, celebrate every small win, and trust the process — with your support, most kids not only settle but grow more resilient for having done it.

GOOD TO KNOW

Navigating a new school successfully **builds real resilience** — a hard transition, well-supported, becomes a lasting strength.

QUICK REFERENCE

The Settling-In Checklist

A practical checklist for helping any child adjust to any new school — adapt it to your child's age and situation.

Before day one

Tour the school, meet the teacher, walk the route and layout, and talk through what the day will look like.

First days

Keep mornings calm, give a warm brief goodbye, and encourage one small connection — a peer or a trusted adult.

Friends (the priority)

Get your child into an activity or team, arrange playdates for younger kids, and coach how to join in and connect.

Academics & home-school link

Talk with new teachers about gaps or challenge; introduce yourself to staff and the counselor; get involved.

Emotions, routines & watching

Validate feelings, keep steady routines and sleep, and watch for persistent unhappiness, avoidance, or bullying — act if it doesn't ease.

BELONGING TAKES TIME — AND SUPPORT

Find Your Community.

Explore our School Transitions series, Student Wellbeing guide, and grade-by-grade roadmaps — among **1,297 free resources** to help every child thrive.

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