

# Calming back-to-school jitters - yours and your child's

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The brand-new backpack is packed, the new sneakers are scuff-free, and the route to school has been strategically planned out. Everything's ready for the first day of school – except you. So if your child's a little nervous about starting preschool, kindergarten or any new school, it may be time for a little maternal mental makeover.

"The mother is the compass of the household and everyone revolves around her," says [Debbie Mandel](#), radio host and author of "Changing Habits: The Caregiver's Total Workout." (Her Web site is [www.turnonyourinnerlight.com](http://www.turnonyourinnerlight.com).) "If you are calm, your child will inhale that calmness, so try to have a calm assertiveness on the first day. Remember: stress is contagious."

Many parents don't even realize they're reflecting high anxiety as they accompany their child to school the first day, says [Rebecca Weingarten](#), a former early childhood teacher who now works as a parenting coach. ([www.dailylifeconsulting.com](http://www.dailylifeconsulting.com).)

"Parents are used to being involved with their children 24/7 and all of a sudden that is changing," she says. "I've watched parents be everything from anxious to hysterical on the first day of school."

To help get your child warm up to the idea of her new role as a student, talk about it ahead of time, Weingarten recommends. Give your child a special notebook to use to color pictures of how she imagines school will be. And try to put yourself in her place.

"Think about how you as an adult feel when starting a new job," Weingarten says. "You don't know anyone there, you don't know the routines, and everything is unknown. Now think of how it is for a child. They don't even know where the bathroom is – which can be a big concern for a child. They are not in control of the situation, which can be scary."

If possible, visit the school with your child ahead of time and walk the route back and forth a couple of times. If there is an opportunity to meet the teacher beforehand, so much the better. At home, play "school" with your child, acting out activities with dolls and puppets. Read your child stories about school, and answer all your child's questions honestly. If she wants to know if you are going to be leaving her alone, say, "I'll leave you for a little while, but I will come back at lunchtime."

Don't force your child to wear the clothes you think would look best. [Victoria Pericon](#), whose Web site is [SavvyMommy.com](http://SavvyMommy.com), suggests letting your child choose from two approved outfits for the first day. "That way, they are wearing something they feel comfortable in," she says.

Also, she says, reassure your kid that it's perfectly normal to be nervous and say that after school, you'll all celebrate the first day with a special dinner. "Tell your child, remember what you do today because I can't wait to hear," she says.

Above all, keep your efforts low-key so your kid won't wind up feeling more stressed than eager. On the first day, hang around for no more than 15 minutes. Be sure to tell both your child and your teacher that you are leaving. This way, another caring adult is on hand when you make your exit. Keep your goodbyes brief and positive. Tell him you'll miss him, remind him that he will have a great day, and then leave. If your child cries, don't rush back in for a "rescue." Now is the time to remind yourself that the teacher is a pro and can handle the situation.

Then focus on this thought: chances are that as soon as you leave, your child will probably cheer up and start exploring the classroom and playing with other kids. Then treat yourself either to coffee, a manicure or breakfast with a friend – preferably a seasoned expert who's been through it with her own child. And give yourself an "A" for effort. After all, you got through one of motherhood's toughest transitions.