



Reassure With Routines and Rituals

The start of school brings social and emotional pressures that present enormous challenges for kids. Try some reassuring rituals to create an emotional connection as they leave for school and return home.

Acknowledge Feelings, Create a Ritual

Even the most self-assured kids approach a new school year with worries. Will they make new friends and keep the old friends? Will they measure up to what's expected in academics and extracurricular activities? Where's the new classroom? What if they disappoint their parents or teachers? How will they sit still at their desks after a summer of freedom?

Along with the academic skills children acquire in school as they grow, they are learning to rely on themselves and develop confidence. They can use some help from the caring adults in their lives as they build the social and emotional smarts that foster self-reliance.

Remember that the routines and rituals of family life are very powerful. They can be very simple. Repetition is key. And why not get your child to participate in creating the ritual?

If you drop your child off in a carpool line, maybe the ritual could be unhooking the seatbelt and offering each other a special handshake or fist bump. Maybe it's as simple as a kiss on the nose as your child heads out the door or something you say every single time. Stick with it, even if your kids say, "Oh, Dad," and roll their eyes. This is the kind of routine your kids will secretly love, so ignore their protests.

Maybe the ritual can revolve around found objects from a good time you had together this summer – shells collected on the beach or rocks from a hike through the woods.

Tell some stories of your own school days – especially with happy endings – and help ease anxiety and stay connected. Let your child know it's normal to feel nervous.

Acknowledge your own feelings as well as theirs, and model for your child what will help. For example, you might say, "When I miss you, I'm going to touch this pebble in my pocket. You can do the same. Let's make sure there are pockets in the clothes you wear to school."