

Worried about separation anxiety or problems at drop off? Check out these helpful hints to ensure a smooth transition!

Drop-off can be a stressful time for a parent, student, or both. Whether tears, anger, or other emotional reactions are the result, a student's day does not get off to a good start and a parent or guardian leaves school feeling stressed, worried and often at a loss for what to do to make this situation better.

The good news is... Your student is *usually* a lot happier once the day goes on! Of course, this isn't always true, but the height of a child's anxiety/sadness/anger/ [insert applicable emotion here] is usually at the point *right before you leave school*, meaning it will only get better once the separation occurs! It is so hard to leave your child when he or she is feeling that way, but staying really only prolongs the difficult part. In addition to understanding this, below are some more tried-and-true tips for a more successful drop-off:

- **Make sure you explain beforehand your drop-off routine clearly and often.** This way, your child is completely aware of what will happen; surprises are not helpful to the anxious or upset child. The earlier you start is also better, priming your child the night before that he or she will be going to school, and be left there to learn with his or her teacher and class.
- **Always tell your child exactly when you'll be back and where you will be picking him or her up.** Again, there are no surprises. Your child knows how long he or she has to wait until you are there, and that you will be in a familiar place. Also, during the day a teacher may prompt students who are missing someone that they will see them when they get picked up. If a student hears it twice, it's even more believable, right?!
- **Consequently, make sure you follow this same routine every morning!** If you say it, but don't follow through, it will heighten anxiety. Things happen, but make it a priority to keep as stable a routine as possible.
- **Bring an item from home that reminds the student of you/home/comfort.** This can be a small stuffed animal, trinket, picture, a toy. Discuss this with your child's teacher and maybe he or she will also have a comfort item for your student to use when upset.
- **Be sure that your child is getting plenty of sleep the night before and eating a healthy breakfast.** This will help to eliminate stress and emotional reactivity to lack of sleep as yet another complication to your morning. As parents know, a child who is tired is a lot more work to calm and also to deal with! They will also not be their best for learning.
- **Stay relaxed with a happy or calm expression.** As a parent, there is no doubt that you are stressed and probably upset at seeing your child so sad or angry that you are leaving them. However, showing your stress only makes the student less calm as well. By modeling for them a calm and positive attitude about school drop-off, you can show them that this school a safe place to be and you are happy to have your child stay there at school.
- **Do NOT hang around at school or prolong the goodbyes.** Some parents will stick around to check in later (with the teacher when student is not looking, or to observe through a window) but this is dangerous because your student may see you and that will trigger all of the same emotions as when you were trying to leave. It also violates what you told them: "She said she was going to come back at 2:00, but she lied because she is here now!"
- **Set up a reward chart.** Create a system in which your child works towards something special, putting a sticker on each day your child separates from you without too much trouble. This should lead to a bigger prize after many consecutive days. If you want some help or suggestions, ask your school counselor!