

WEAVERBIRD EXPERT TIPS

Starting School



KEEPING CONNECTED

- Children can find change challenging. When a child is going through change in new environments, such as school, being present and providing a loving home is even more important than ever.
- Use physical affection to show love and support; sometimes no words are needed and hugging, stroking a child's back etc can be soothing and settling especially when they are reconnecting with you after a day at school.
- If possible, try and build your child's connection with the school before they start; getting uniforms in advance, attending orientation days, pointing out the school if you travel past it, arranging meet-ups with other parents who have children starting at the school, talking through the new routine and allowing them to choose their drink bottle and lunch bag.
- When you are dropping your child at school in the early days, ensure they have connected with their teacher before you leave them, and let them know where you will pick them up.
- Make an effort for the child to feel safe, secure and connected wherever possible. For example, maintain a regular and predictable routine. Ensure you clearly explain to your child what will happen when they go to school that day – who will collect them, what time etc.
- Try to maintain or increase fun times for the child; if school is a stressful place, it is important to balance it with other pleasurable times in their routine.
- Prompt your child by asking how they are getting along with other children at school. Listen carefully and really hear what the child is saying, without interrupting or reacting with strong emotions. Ask open ended questions to solicit the best response.
- Work through the [Weaverbirds Activities](#) which focus on connection remaining even when you are not present. For example. our 'Always in my Heart' activity is useful for exploring feelings.
- Even the most caring teachers and schools can overlook frequent communication with parents. If you have concerns about how your child is managing the transition to the new school, then be proactive in keeping the communication regular.
- Take note of any feedback from your child's teacher. They can be a useful source of information and provide an unbiased perspective.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

- Look to increase your child's confidence in other areas of their life. Children gain confidence through autonomy and accomplishments, so maximise any small ways that

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too, however big emotions can be unsettling for the child and may heighten their anxiety and distress on separating. Through your behaviour, you are aiming to send the message to your child that you are confident that they can have a successful day at school (even if you are not feeling it inside!).

- Sharing big emotions with children may create an obstacle to your child sharing their own feelings and seeking support. Big feelings from a caregiver can cause a child to worry that you might not be able to cope with hearing their concerns. If you feel you are not coping, draw on other resources and recognise when external support from friends or professionals may be helpful.

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

- Just like learning to read, understanding patterns in our behaviour, and articulating and understanding own emotions takes practice.
- You may benefit from reading your Weaverbirds Story regularly, as well as children's books on this topic.
- Use the activities in your story and those on our [website](#).
- Sign up to our [Weaverbird Blog](#) for new tips and activities.

CONSISTENCY

- Aim to keep a consistent morning routine allowing plenty of time to get to school before the bell so your child can settle in, put their bag away and find their class teacher. If you are collecting your child try and ensure you are there waiting for them before they finish for the day.
- As children find change unsettling, the more you can keep routines, boundaries and rituals the same, the more contained your child will feel. For example, keep the same bedtime routine, same familiar TV shows, same outings and weekly habits etc.
- Keep changes to a minimum. Ideally other areas of their life will remain similar while they are settling in.
- Whilst it is tempting to be more lenient with a child during difficult periods, it is important to remember that boundaries and expectations are containing and predictable for a child and help them feel secure. Being mindful of the way we parent however, can be helpful. It is still possible to uphold expectations and yet show compassion; this can be done by validating the child's struggles, using a firm but kind manner and still following through on pre-agreed consequences if family rules/ expectations are not met. For example, your child's toys are removed for 5 minutes for hitting others.

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you can foster age-appropriate independence. For example, let the child choose the clothes they wear, ask them to help you pack their lunchbox, encourage them to speak up and order their own food at the café.

- Many children expend a lot of energy completing their work and keeping their emotions in check when they are participating during the school day. Keep extra-curricular activities to a minimum especially in the first few terms and allow your child the chance to play and unwind at home in a relaxed and familiar environment.

MANAGING YOUR CHILD'S FEELINGS

- Listen – stop what you are doing, look at the child and allow them time to explain, to show that what they are saying is important to you.
- Give your child opportunities where they can learn to use body clues to identify feelings and emotions. For example, watch TV with the sound off, ask them to guess how the people in the show are feeling.
- When you notice your child is experiencing a particular emotion, help them to name it. eg. 'I can see you are feeling sad'.
- Validate your child's emotion e.g. 'I know you worry about who will take care of you while you are at school; I am concerned about this too, and I am confident that your teacher will do a great job of making sure you are taken care of.'
- Whilst continuing to validate the child's challenging situation and emotions, point out that they are not alone and other children are in a similar position and share similar feelings.
- Try to stay patient whilst managing any difficult behaviour by first empathising with your child. For example, 'I love you and I know you are worried about today; however, you know that hitting your sister is not ok'.
- Make allowances for the fact that your child is getting used to a change in routine and expectations and is likely to be very tired; you may need to adapt the usual routine slightly to allow for this while they adjust. For example, make an earlier dinner and bedtime.
- If you are concerned by continuing or increasing 'big feelings,' seek further support for your child (see Accessing More Help section below).

MANAGING YOUR FEELINGS

- Whilst it can be heart-breaking to see your child feeling anxious or sad, and facing an emotional separation as you say goodbye in the morning at school, it is more helpful for your child if you keep big emotions private; it is natural to share that you will miss them

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ACCESS MORE HELP

- Make the most of existing social supports and family members. If you don't feel you have adequate social supports speak to your GP about a referral to a Mental Health professional; it is often helpful to find a therapist who specialises in your area of need. The school may be able to recommend a therapist that other children with similar experiences have found helpful.
- If you, your family members or school have concerns or are noticing any of the following behaviours, speak with your GP about a referral to a Child Psychologist:
 - Ongoing social isolation or withdrawal
 - Aggressive or acting out behaviour
 - Regression (not being able to do skills previously mastered)
 - Significant distress on separation from caregivers
 - Crying more than usual

OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESILIENCE

- Starting school is a life changing event for your child and a great opportunity to build resilience. Ever heard of the book 'Your Fantastic Elastic Brain' by JoAnn Deak? – Well, our brain is just that – it can stretch and grow. Just as we exercise our bodies, we can also exercise our brains and learn and master new skills.
- Supporting your child to manage difficult times and ride the waves of emotion, provides them with the confidence that they are able to tackle the challenges that life will throw at them. Try and use this difficult time for your family as an opportunity for growth, so that you are able to experience some positives. There are a number of resources on 'Grit,' 'Growth Mindset' and 'Optimism' for both adults and children.

FURTHER READING

Children's Books:

- Starting School, Jane Godwin
- The Invisible String, Patrice Karst (Useful for Connection)
- In My Heart, Jo Witek (Useful for Feelings)
- Your Fantastic Elastic Brain, JoAnn Deak (Useful for Perseverance, Growth Mindset)
- What Do You Do With A Problem, Kobi Yamada (Useful for Courage, Facing Fears, Grit)
- Have You Filled a Bucket Today, Carol McCloud (Useful for Feeling Uplifted by Giving to Others)

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Weblinks:

- <https://www.maggiedent.com/common-concerns/choosing-school/>
- <https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/school-learning/school-choosing-starting-moving/starting-school>
- <https://www.education.sa.gov.au/parenting-and-child-care/parenting/parenting-sa/parent-easy-guides/starting-school-parent-easy-guide>

Podcasts:

- https://abcmedia.akamaized.net/rn/podcast/2018/01/lms_20180130_0927.mp3

Resilience:

- <https://www.maggiedent.com/blog/episode-8-how-to-raise-a-resilient-child-parental-as-anything-abc-podcast/>

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