



**XAVIER RIDDLE AND THE SECRET MUSEUM**

## **How to Prepare Your Child for a New School**

By Samantha Gratton

Jul 12, 2022

This year my son will go from the preschool he's known his entire life to kindergarten at a new elementary school. Months ago, he was excited. But as the reality set in, he became nervous and scared.

In "Xavier Riddle and the Secret Museum," Yadina is anxious about moving from kindergarten to first grade. Instead of cubbies and play stations, the first grade room is much bigger with hooks and desks. Her older brother, Xavier, and friend, Brad, encourage her with a trip to the secret museum. There they meet Alexander Hamilton, who is about to embark on a big adventure — including going to school for the first time ever!

Whether your child is changing schools, getting a new teacher, or simply switching from a summer routine to a school year routine, school changes can bring out a lot of emotions for both of you.

As parents and caretakers, we can support our children as they enter the new school year.

**Here are 10 ways to make the school transition a good one:**

**1 Embrace the adventure.** A positive perspective can help your kids take on the opportunities ahead of them. "Talk about what's exciting, what they feel uncertain or unsure about, and set little goals each day so they can be proud when they fulfill those goals," said Cam Ellis, senior administrator for transition to kindergarten and family engagement for the Office of Early Learning of Wake County in North Carolina. This could include things like learning one person's name, trying a new game for the first time, or being brave when saying goodbye and walking into the classroom.

**2 Acknowledge their feelings.** Affirm that your child feels seen and heard. Instead of skipping over their fears, validate how they feel while continuing to encourage them. Elementary school counselor Bill Reaume in Pennsylvania tells students, "You don't have to stop being nervous to do the thing you're nervous about. We all do things while we're nervous about doing them."

**3 Ask questions.** Let your kids express their concerns. My son is extroverted, so I assumed making new friends would be easy for him. After asking about why he felt scared about going to a new school, I learned his main concern wasn't making new friends, but losing the friendships he already had. I was then able to reassure him that we would stay connected with his preschool friends through play dates.

**4 Share with the school.** Teachers want to work together with you to better support your student. Communication is key. Relaying what your child is interested in, what they are struggling with, how your child likes to be celebrated, and who lives at home can lead to a more meaningful connection. "If a child is moving schools because there is a big change at home, the teacher should be given a heads up about that big change," said Ellis. "They can provide emotional support much better if they know."

**5 Practice ahead of time.** Find ways to practice what your child will be doing during the new school year. "Drive by the school. Stop in at the playground. If you know other kids, set up a playdate or two. That really can go a long way," Reaume said. If your child has a hard time with separation anxiety and doesn't want to leave you, practice time away by dropping your child off for a play date or trying new things like a music class or sports activity. Each new experience builds confidence and independence.

**6 Establish routines in advance.** Kids thrive when they have healthy routines. If you aren't in the habit of regular routines for meals, taking baths, and brushing teeth, try to start them a few weeks before school starts.

**7 Talk to someone who can relate.** Do you have a friend, neighbor, or older sibling your child can talk to about going to school? Talking to someone who might have similar feelings can remind kids that they are not alone in their fears, anxieties, and questions. In "Xavier Riddle and the Secret Museum," Yadina asks Alexander Hamilton if he's nervous to go to a new place with new people for the very first time. He's a little nervous, but mostly excited because "new adventures are exciting!"

**8 Draw or write out what to expect.** Facing unknowns can be scary. Help your child focus on what they do know. At preschool, my son had a schedule with what was happening each day. Consider making a visual calendar with pictures of eating breakfast, getting dressed, driving to school, reading a book, eating lunch, playing on the playground, and getting picked up afterwards.

**9 Lead by example.** Young children can pick up on their parents' emotions. "If you're anxious about your child going to school (which is normal), work that out with your partner or others, not your child," said Reaume. When talking about the new school year, focus on the positive and ask your child open-ended questions.

**10 Make it special.** Celebrate! Make the first week of school special by leaving an encouraging note in their lunch box, taking a picture to mark the occasion, or letting your child pick out their favorite shirt. After, enjoy their favorite meal together or eat a special treat.

Here's to a new school year full of exciting adventures!

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