

First Day Jitters

By Julie Danneberg

Everyone knows the jumble of feelings as the first day of school approaches -- especially if it's the first day at a new school. Children and adults delight in the surprise ending! This is also a great opportunity to discuss feelings and emotions related to changes and transitions, as well as some wonderful coping skills to manage the "first day jitters."

Video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2oBdX3H2Rg>

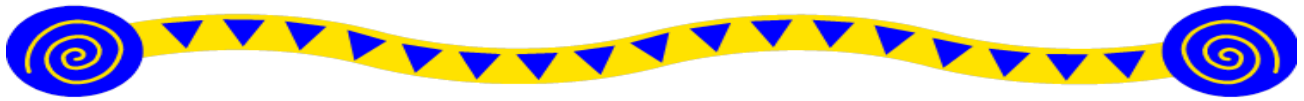
Parent Activity

Reading the Story

Important talking points to cover before reading the book:

- As you introduce the book and title, ask your children if they know what the word "Jitters" means? Do they have other words that describe that same feeling (scared, nervous, etc.)?
- Go on to ask your children if they have ever felt nervous or "Jittery?" Have them give you specific examples from their life experiences.
- Ask your children what types of things make them nervous and how they usually handle or cope with the feeling or activity? Do they talk to someone? Do they cry? Do they hide?
- Explain to the children that everyone gets anxious/ nervous. Tell your children what makes you nervous and what you do when you are feeling nervous or scared.
- Continue by explaining that everyone expresses anxiety/ nervousness in different ways. Ask the children how they know if someone else is nervous.
- Discuss with your children that transitions or changes in life often make people nervous. Introduce the fact that starting to school, changing schools, and even being promoted to a higher grade in





school (transition from Pre-K to KK) can cause anxiety. Have your child openly discuss their feelings about this upcoming transition.

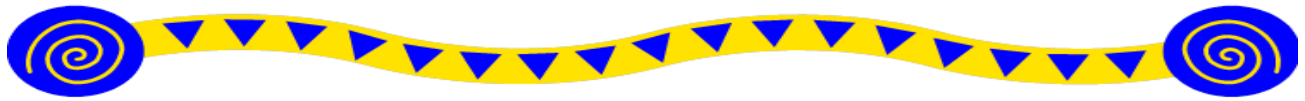


Reading the Story: Start preparing your child for the back-to-school transition by beginning a structured evening routine. Having a bed-time routine of reading a book is a great activity! Use this time to utilize the talking points provided above, and to read the book to your children. After completing the talking points and reading the book, allow your children to discuss things that make them nervous or anxious. Have the children identify ways in which the character in the book appeared anxious. Use the pictures in the book to guide the conversation. Have your child identify things related to the upcoming school transition that they are worried about...catching the bus? Meeting new friends? Leaving behind family and friends at home? Allow your child to discuss these fears openly and then assist them with calming their nerves by clarifying things a bit (“You will catch the bus every morning at 6:30am in front of our house. I will wake you up and help you get ready. I will walk you out to the bus and wave goodbye. You will go to school and have a GREAT day! The teacher will help you find your bus in the afternoon, and when the bus drops you off after school I will be waiting for you!”). Clarifying these events helps to ease children’s fears about the “unknown” or upcoming unfamiliar events in their lives.

Home Activities: Continue to connect school and home by using this art activity. This art activity will assist in decreasing your child’s anxiety about the school transition. Map making is another fun idea! Have your child make a map from your house to the school, and write down a time schedule of when you will drop off and return to pick them up. This will serve as a visual reminder of when they will see you again. Take a large piece of paper and lay it out on the floor, have your child draw pictures of businesses and buildings they pass on the way to the school. Assist your child with putting roads in the correct place on the map, and assist them with map directions. Once the oversized map is complete take a toy car, and “drive” your child through the car-ride to school on the map. You can even create a small pocket sized map for your child to carry. It may even be helpful to make a map of the child’s school and where the new classroom is located in the school building. You can assist your child with this activity and discuss different parts of the map and schedule.

Structured Schedule prior to transition: The number one way to decrease anxiety about school transition is setting up a consistent daily routine. Children thrive on consistency. Many families take it easy in the summer being more relaxed on bedtimes and wake up times, so a few weeks prior to school starting/ resuming, start a specific daily routine. Allow your child to have some input about the afternoon schedule so that they will feel



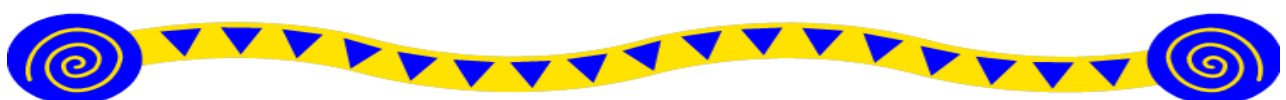


like they have some control over their time. Set up structured meal times, bath times, quiet/ homework times, and bedtime routines. Once the routine has been established, write down the schedule and post it in a place that everyone can see, like the refrigerator so that it will be a visual reminder about what needs to be done. Starting a few weeks in advance will help to make the first days of school less chaotic which will increase the chances that your child will have a successful day at school!

Prevention Tactics for melt down: Many parents say that mornings are the most difficult part of the school routine. One way to alleviate the struggles of morning routines is to prepare the night before. Allow your child to choose an outfit including pants, shirts, socks, shoes, jackets, and hair accessories the night before. This will decrease the morning scramble. Make sure it is clean and pressed before your child goes to bed. You can even set up a system where your child picks out her entire wardrobe for the five days of school the Sunday before school resumes. Being prepared will decrease tension and anxiety about being on time to school.

Family Discussion: Make sure you have prepared your child for this school transition. Talk about the new school positively, make sure your child has seen the school at least once prior to the first day of school, meet the teacher if possible, discuss school rules and expectations, and ensure that all supplies have been purchased prior to the first day of school. Many schools have specific supplies needed for each grade, and can usually be obtained by contacting the school or looking on the schools website. To help with school transition definitely read the book, and discuss using a transition item for school. A transition item is an item that your child can carry with them that reminds them of you and the safety they feel when with you. Some children have a favorite lovey, but a transitional item can be a family picture, a special coin you give your child, or a rock. You give your child the item and have him place it in his/ her pocket. Explain to your child that you know it will be difficult to be apart, but this transition item will help until you return. Explain to your child that if he feels lonely or sad to put his hand on the transition item and remember that you will be together again soon and that it is a reminder of how much he is loved.

Additional Talking Points/ Activities: To assist young children with transitioning to school, make sure that your family discusses school in a positive light. If you had a bad school experience and you discuss school in a negative manner your child may have a negative experience as well. Make sure that you discuss fun and exciting things about school. Talk about your first day of school, the things you remember (good and scary), and describe how you worked through this transitional time in your life. You can even look at your old school pictures and talk about these times. Also allow your child to talk about things they hope to learn or accomplish this school year. Write down these goals and place it in an envelope, later in the year open up the goal sheet and see how your child progressed. One great idea is to create a poster board that says “Jessica’s first day





of Kindergarten” in big glittery letters. Take the poster board to school and have your child hold the poster board while her new teachers stands next to her. This could become a great family tradition that can be done for years to come. It helps to make the school transition positive and fun, and comes with a lot of positive memories.

This Book Curriculum was developed by Dr. Susan Elswick. Dr. Elswick is a Clinical Assistant Professor at the University Of Memphis Department Of Social Work. She received her master’s in social work from the University of Tennessee in 2006, and her doctorate in Special Education with a specialty in Applied Behavior Analysis from the University of Memphis in 2011. She is a Licensed School Social Worker in Tennessee, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, and she runs a small private practice that provides in home social work and behavior analytic programming for families in the surrounding area. Prior to joining the faculty at the University Of Memphis Department Of Social Work she was a school-based social work clinician for 10 years. One of her research interests includes the use of early intervention programming to enhance emotional literacy in order to curb child maladaptive behaviors to improve social and educational outcomes.

