

EDUCATION

How to beat the first-day jitters

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Public school starts on Tuesday, but parents and children already have their homework cut out for them if they want to kick the first-day jitters.

Whether you're a parent letting go of a child going off to the school for the first time or your kids are transitioning to a new school or grade level, the first day of school can induce anxiety, and some local experts said the key to feeling calm this week is getting information, and becoming familiar with the new surroundings.

Knowing ahead of time where things are, who will be teaching, who your kids will be interacting with and the school rules will make it easier for you and your child to feel comfortable on the first day or even the first week back at school.

Prepare in advance

If this is the first time your child is attending school, experts say the key is to remember: just let go.

Practice at home being away from your child a little at a time before it comes time to drop off your child at school, said Guam Parent Information Resource Center Director Pauline Camacho.

"This all happens before the first day, allowing the child to go off and explore," she said. "That gives them the confidence to go and do their things."

When your children are allowed to play around the house without you constantly following them around to monitor their every move, they will gain a sense of independence while being reassured that "you're always there" when they come back, Camacho said. But don't wait until the first day to try this out.

"If you drop them off at school and leave, that child is totally going to be scared because you never allowed them to grow and become confident," she said.

Camacho said it's also important to attend the school orientations. If you missed those, there's still a chance tomorrow to possibly drop by your child's school to scope out the classrooms or meet with teachers as they are preparing. Find out where the bathrooms are, especially for young children. Visit the cafeteria and see if you can meet with the administrators, Camacho suggested.

"The more you know about the school, the more ready you'll be," Camacho said. "Knowledge is power."

When it finally comes time to drop your child off at school that first day, let go, even if your child cries, said licensed clinical psychologist Juan M. Rapadas.

Unless your child has a major psychological problem that is recurrent or serious, the child's crying is normal, and the teacher will handle it, he said. He reminded parents that if the child's separation anxiety is prolonged, the teacher will call the



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Inspection: Paul Cepeda, Department of Public Works superintendent of transportation and maintenance, check the seats of a school bus on Aug. 4. Kids go back to school on Aug. 10 and it's still not too late for parents to help quell their children's back-to-school jitters.

Making the decision: Pack or pay for lunch

Pacific Sunday News

Parents can now easily plan on whether to give lunch money or prepare a packed lunch at home for their kids.

The Guam Department of Education on Friday released its school meal menus through December, and those menus are available online for download at the Pacific Daily News website — www.GuamPDN.com.

Starting January though, parents who opt to have their kids eat the school meals will have to pack a little extra lunch money. The price of regular school meals

will increase from \$1.50 to \$2.00 starting January, according to Pacific Daily News files.

ON THE NET

▲ See the breakfast and lunch school menus through September at www.GuamPDN.com.

Packing a lunch can be one way parents can quell first day jitters for younger students. Montessori School of Guam director Anna Wignarajah said engaging in activities together that deal with school preparations will help students get excited about the start of school.

Check out the Wellness Works section for a list of brain foods that will help keep your kids alert. Also find out what foods will slow their metabolism and drain them of energy in tomorrow's PDN.

parents him/herself.

"Just be able to let go, you'll appreciate the free time," he said. "Generally, a kid is pretty resilient."

But remember: be prompt in picking them up, adds Anna Wignarajah, director of the Montessori School of Guam.

She added that parents can do some activities the night before the first day to get their kids excited about the first day. For example, pack a lunch for the next day, together. If you went school shopping, get them excited about being able to use their new school bag, uniform or

pencils on the first day.

If you can sense that a certain issue such as potty training for young children, or acne for teens, is a cause of apprehension for your kid, Rapadas suggests recalling stories from

your own youth, to let your kids know that you went through similar problems.

It won't hurt to exaggerate either, to make them feel bet-

ter, he said.

"As a parent, you want to relate your own stories to your kids, even way down to the kindergarten," Rapadas said. "Tell them how you had

ON THE NET

For more tips on how to ease back to school jitters, check out the following websites:

- ▲ www.parenthood.com
- ▲ www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=1301
- ▲ http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/learning/back_school.html

a lot of acne in school, had to turn away smokers, how you never had a date, for the younger kids, how you peed in your pants," Rapadas said.

Preteens and teens

Older kids experience anxiety over other issues such as the prospect of bullying or their appearance and fitting in, said Rapadas.

"For older kids especially, anything connected to not going to school has to do with social issues," said the psychologist, who frequently works with troubled youth at the Department of Youth Affairs. "Middle school kids just want to survive, (in) high school, they're more focused on looks."

As a follow up, Rapadas said parents should — at least for the first week — debrief with their kids once they come home from school. Ask them how their day was, but don't let them get away with a simple answer like, "Fine," he said. Instead, engage them in conversation so you can get a sense of what potential problems there may be. Try to get to know their teachers, administrators and friends by name.

For younger kids, ask them to bring home the name of one new classmate each day, so you know your child's friends and ensure that your child is making friends and being social at school, suggested Camacho.

Back To School