

# 9 Concerns every parent has when kids start school (and how to deal)



by **Whitney Coy**

Aug 1, 2015 at 12:00 a.m. ET



Image: MachineHeadz/E+/Getty Images

Share

Tweet

Pin

Starting kindergarten can be scary for kids, but believe it or not, it might be worse for parents.

I was a complete mess during the weeks leading up to my oldest daughter's first day of school, and the act of actually leaving her was nothing short of terrifying.

I told myself for months that she would be fine, and that I had to hold it together for her sake — but when that morning finally arrived, I was a hopeless, whimpering pile of snot and tears.

Yes, this big step meant that my baby was growing up, but honestly, that wasn't the cause of my distress. I was scared out of my mind. As a work-at-home mom, my girl had spent her whole life at my hip, and I was about to send her out into the world... alone.

My husband, seeing me in tears, thought I had lost my mind. And for a moment, I'll admit, I thought I may have boarded the crazy train that August day. Thankfully, speaking with other moms has reassured me that I wasn't alone in my anguish. In fact, [parenting and child development expert Denise Daniels](#) confirmed that my reaction was actually quite normal.

"For parents, it's a developmental milestone," says Daniels of the first day of school.

With the help of Daniels and a few "been there, done that" parents, I'm going to tackle parents' most common kindergarten fears and concerns one by one, so you can spend the big day way less freaked out than I was.

## 1. They'll be scared

Many parents worry that their littles will be scared of their first day of school. It's all a huge change for them, so there's a good chance they will be. You can help lessen that fear, though, by not letting them see you scared. Learn from my mistakes — save your crying for later, mama.

"They need to know that we have confidence in them," said Daniels. "Kids are very intuitive, and if you're stressed out or anxious, they'll feel that."

## 2. They'll miss me

I know this is the last thing you want to hear, but you're going to miss them a lot more than they'll miss you. They just don't have the time! Kindergarten is not what it was when we were in school. Gone are nap times and hours of building with blocks on the carpet. Their days are packed tight with learning and fun and recess and more. By the time they get a chance to think about missing you, it'll be time to go home. It does help, though, to reassure your kiddo that the day will end and you'll be reunited. Tuck a note into their lunch box for a midday reminder that you're thinking about them.

## 3. They'll get lost

School is a big new place, and that can be intimidating for both mamas and their babies. It's not likely, though, that your little one will be sent to navigate the halls on their own on the first day. Kindergarten classes tend to travel in packs, and their teachers are not going to send them out alone to get lost.

To help put aside these fears, Daniels suggests touring the school with your child ahead of the school year. "Visit the school, and find out where everything is. Where are the bathrooms? Where is the teacher?" Knowing all of this ahead of time will help you both feel more in control on day one.

## 4. They won't eat lunch

Parents, this is one fear that may very well turn into a reality those first few weeks, and there's not a lot you can do about it. They're probably not used to the short time they're allotted to complete their meals, and there is just *so much* socializing to do during the lunch hour. Pack some foods they really

love to help entice them to munch, and rest assured that what they eat at snack time will keep them from starving before they get home.

If you suspect your child isn't eating because of a nervous stomach, talk with their teacher. My daughter brought her lunch home virtually untouched for the first month of school, and it turned out the anxiety of socializing with kids who were not yet her friends made her appetite non-existent. Thankfully, the teacher who had lunch duty saw what was happening and took a few minutes every day to calm her down and persuade her to take a few bites. As the year progressed, her social anxieties disappeared — and so did her lunch.

## **5. They won't make friends**

It seems so easy for kids to make new friends, but that's not always the case. Especially when they're overwhelmed with an environment and schedule that's also completely new. And not all kids are social butterflies.

"Teachers are saying that over 30 percent of the students entering their classrooms lack the necessary social skills. Teachers believe that learning those skills is important," said Daniels. She encourages parents to teach their children how to make friends when they are as young as two, by teaching them how to communicate properly with us, and with others around them. "Homes are their first classrooms and we are their first teachers," she said.

If you stay at home with your children, make sure they are exposed to other children now and then. Encourage them to interact and play nice, and set up role-playing games at home to help them learn how to strike up a conversation.

Daniels warns against forcing introverted children to interact too much, though. "Start off slow, with play dates, and enlist your child's help in deciding on any activities."

## **6. They'll get bullied**

You'll be shocked to learn that mean kids exist even at this young age, and there are probably a few on the playground with your kid at recess. It's inevitable that one day your child will come face to face with a bully, but everything will turn out fine if they know how to handle it.

Daniels advises tackling this subject with a serious conversation. Let them know they might find someone at school who isn't nice, but that they don't have to put up with it. "Tell them they have three options," she added. "Walk away, tell the teacher or play with other kids." She recommended role playing the situation at home so your kiddo won't be caught off guard.

"We're waiting too long to teach these kids how to handle this," said Daniels. "Start early, at home, so they know they'll be able to take care of themselves at school."

## **7. Their teachers won't care for them enough**

This one was my biggest concern. When my daughter was at home, she was loved, watched, cared for and well taken care of. But I was about to hand her off to a perfect stranger who had 24 other children to take care of at the same time. It didn't take me long to realize that I was worrying for nothing.

Teachers, especially those who work with very young children, are special people. They know that when you drop your children off at school, you are leaving your entire world in their hands until the final bell rings. They take that job very seriously.

To put your mind at ease, get to know the teacher. Request meetings before or after school, or email her every now and then just to touch base. If you're able, spend some time in the classroom. Teachers are always looking for parent volunteers, and seeing your child's teacher in action, watching the way she loves them all as if they were her own, will put your mind at ease.

## **8. They won't learn fast enough**

Children learn at different paces, and no one knows this better than your child's teacher. Do your parental duty by reading up on what they should know before they get there, and work on it long before the first day of school. But don't feel bad about the things they just can't get. I can promise you, your child will not be the only one at orientation who cannot tie his shoes. Once school starts, be honest with your child's teacher about where your child excels and struggles.

Your child's teacher will likely keep you very involved in the learning process, so you're far from helpless in this area. Keep in contact with the teacher. Work together to overcome obstacles and you'll become partners in your child's success.

## **9. They'll miss their bus stop**

I've never put my child on the bus, but it's not because I don't live on the bus route. It's because I'm terrified of letting her ride the bus. All those kids! All those stops! What if she misses her stop? What if she gets off on the wrong place?

Now that I have a year of elementary school parenting under my belt (that makes me an expert, right?), I realize that these fears were unfounded. My child's school, as well as most other schools, aren't new at this whole busing thing. They know the littles are new to the process, and they have a system in place to make sure they don't slip through the cracks.

If you have the ability to take your child to school yourself and you want to, by all means, do. But if you need to put them on the bus, have no fear. Most schools offer some kind of orientation for bus riders so they know the rules before school starts. If your district doesn't offer that, call up the bus garage and see if you can arrange for a personal orientation leading up to the big day. On the first day, walk your child onto the bus and introduce them to the driver. When it's time for drop-off, make sure you or someone you know is there to meet your child at the bus stop, and don't let the bus pull away until your child's hand is in yours.

## One last tip

According to Daniels, one of the biggest problems is that moms are feeling bad about feeling bad, and that just makes things worse. "They haven't given themselves permission to be sad," she added. "It's important to remember that they're not alone in this, that all parents feel this way."

She recommends you work through your grief — and that's exactly what it is — by talking to other parents in the same situation. "It's amazing what wonderful support you can get from other parents," she said.