

Advice on helping your child if they are unsettled coming to school

Some children take longer than others to adjust to the idea of being at school/ in a new class. At St. Patrick's, we really want to work with you to help make these anxious moments as infrequent as possible. Below are some ideas on things you can do to help your child make the transition from home to school in the mornings.

Leave plenty of time to get there. Plan for a calm start to the day by having morning and evening routines. For example, get uniforms, lunches and school bags ready the night before, get your child to have a shower or bath in the evening and get your child to bed at a regular time. Rushing to get everyone ready and out of the door in the morning is part of being a parent, but getting there in less of a rush will help it to be an enjoyable experience for you and your child. Coming into the school building with their classmates will also help to reassure your child that coming to school is a normal, exciting thing to do.



Say a (quick) goodbye. It's best to keep the goodbye as quick as possible. Remind them that you'll pick them up using language they'll remember ('just after you've had lunch' or 'after story time') and tell them to enjoy themselves. If your child becomes upset, try to remain calm. Stay for a short time, say goodbye and go. The staff will be experienced at dealing with upset children and will soon have your child distracted and busy doing something exciting. The school will contact you if they remain upset or you can contact the school for reassurance.



Be prepared for a very tired child at home. Even if your child is used to a long day at nursery, a school day can be exhausting. It's a good idea not to plan too many activities for after school for the first few weeks. If your child seems really tired, you might want to bring bedtime forward until they adjust.

Be ready for tears and tantrums. This doesn't necessarily mean that there's a problem, but just that all the excitement, coupled with tiredness, may mean that they need some extra attention and reassurance for a while. You might want to have a couple of treats in reserve in case your child has a particularly tricky day while they are still adjusting.

Organise play-dates. Try to arrange opportunities to meet up and play (bearing in mind COVID guidelines) with a range of children from the class if your child feels up to it. One-to-one playtime can help to develop lasting friendships and is particularly important if your child is a little shy or takes longer to settle. It can also be a good opportunity to get to know other parents.



Show that you believe your child can go to school by saying positive and encouraging things. E.g., "You're going to have lots of fun at school", "I/Granny will be waiting outside at home time". This will build your child's self-confidence. You could also give them something to remember you by. E.g., draw a heart on their hand or a thinking dot on their finger. They can press it when they think of you.



Use clear, calm statements that let your child know you expect them to go to school. Say 'when' rather than 'if'. For example, you can say, 'When you're at school tomorrow ...' instead of 'If you make it to school tomorrow ...'.

Use direct statements that don't give your child the chance to say 'No!' For example, 'It's time to get out of bed' or 'Jo, please get up and get dressed'. This can be applied to many situations, both at home and in school!

Stay calm. If your child sees that you're worried, stressed or frustrated, it can make their anxiety worse.

Talk with your child about school and why they don't want to go. When you're talking to your child show them that you understand. For example, you could say, 'I can see you're worried about going to school. I know it's hard, but it's good for you to go. Your teacher and I will help you'. It's OK for us to have feelings, but we can learn how to cope with them when they get too much.



Do your absolute best not to 'give in'. If you feel that it's better to take your child home than go through the stress at the school door that is understandable, but remember that every time you take them home when they cry about going to school you are teaching them that this tactic will work on another day. Therefore, you are just prolonging the settling in period!

Make your home 'boring' during school hours so that you don't accidentally reward your child for not going to school. This means little or no TV or video games and so on.



And finally: look after yourself too!

Here's a helpful article from the Irish Times:

['It's a struggle getting my daughter to school every day' \(irishtimes.com\)](https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-fashion/parenting/it-s-a-struggle-getting-my-daughter-to-school-every-day-1.4244444)