

# TODAY'S Parent

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## Back To School: Preparing Your Child With Special Needs

By Gina Maranga

SPECIAL TO TODAY'S PARENT


Preparation is often the key to easing transitions and this is certainly true for all young children, including those with special needs, who often have difficulty with changes in their routines.

One of the major transitions that all children face each year is going back to school after summer vacation. This transition is particularly wrought with emotions - sadness at seeing the summer end, anticipation, excitement and anxiety about a new school year, and for some, fear of the unknown. Knowing that your child might be experiencing these emotions and addressing them as they are expressed, will help your child understand and anticipate the changes ahead. Visiting the school the week before school begins will help build anticipation and can dispel anxiety that your child might be experiencing. Reading familiar books, singing familiar school songs, and talking with your child's about their prior positive school experiences, the school bus, and their school friends is a good way of reminding and preparing your child for what lies ahead.

Going back to school also brings with it changes to the daily routine - earlier bed-times, earlier mornings, and structured days - all of which may have been eased during summer break. Giving your child time to adjust to these changes will help ease the transition. Using a calendar to count down the days until school begins can give your child a better sense of what is to come. It also provides an opportunity to plan out those remaining days of summer and make the most of them.

Taking time with your child to review their work from the past year, through-

out the summer or in the weeks prior to the start of the school year, will reinforce what was learned in the prior year and keep them on track for the start of the new school year. Gearing up for the school year is a fun and rewarding way to ease the transition. Including your child in shopping for school supplies and new clothes, having them select a new book bag, lunch box or clothes for the first day of school builds anticipation and gives them a sense of control over what is to come in the days ahead.

Establishing an end-of-summer event is also a good way to help your child prepare for the new school year. This can be that one last barbeque with family and friends; a day at the beach, a weekend away, or a family fun day at home that can become your end of summer tradition, marking the transition each year. The memories and comfort that tradition brings will become something that your child will look forward to that will signal the end of summer and ease them into the start of a new school year. 

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*Gina Maranga is Director of Program Operations at Block Institute, located in Brooklyn, provides educational services to children (primarily 3-5 years old) with special needs such as: cerebral palsy, global developmental delays, cognitive delays, traumatic brain injury, medically fragile and/or medically involved. Children diagnosed as Autistic, Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder are also well served.*