

Helping Achieve School Success

Getting ready for school can be an overwhelming experience for a child as well as for foster parents. You may have a child in your home beginning at a new school, returning to the same school, or may have a new child coming into your home during the school year who you haven't even met yet. There's a lot of information and things to remember. We hope the following will help you and your child prepare for having a successful school year.

Preparing to Start at a New School

The first step in starting at a new school is making sure to register your child. You also need to make sure that the new school obtains previous school records. If your child has an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 plan, make sure you also get a copy.

School districts vary widely in their enrollment processes. If you run into any issues, hopefully, your worker and your child's parents can help in the process.

Additionally, talking to former teachers is often helpful in understanding what your child might need to be successful at the new school.

In order to help ease some stress for both you and your child, try to meet with the current teacher before starting at a new school. For more information, see the Coalition's tip

sheet [Helping Kids in Care Change Schools](#).

Other things you might consider include:

Volunteering in the classroom a day or two a week, or as often as your schedule permits, or joining your child for lunch to help with this transition. If you aren't able to be with your child at school, maybe a scheduled phone call

to check in during the day can help him feel more at ease. Your child may only need you to do so until they are feeling comfortable. However, some children may need extra support from you throughout the school year.

Finding out what works best for

ongoing communication between you and the teachers. This might be regularly scheduled phone calls, emails, or a communication notebook that goes back and forth. Being proactive can help your child have a successful school year—don't wait until conference time to address issues.

Sharing information before your child starts school. When children enter care, their home environment has changed and this often impacts their school performance. Ideally, all of you—birth parents, child welfare worker, child, and yourself—will meet together before school starts. If that is unable to happen, then talk with those same people about what information you can share and what should be kept private.

Continued on page 2



Your child may feel stigmatized from being in the foster care system. He may not want his peers or even school staff to know that he is in care. Talk with your child about how to address this before he starts school.

As with many things, who you know and learning the unspoken rules is what helps you the most. Getting to know teachers, school staff, and other parents is invaluable. “I still get intimidated at times, especially when enrolling a new student or when my kids change teachers,” says one veteran parent. “But it helps that I have a good relationship with the office staff.”



are team up with them for success.

- *Celebrating successes.* Make a big deal out of accomplishments—no matter how big or small.

- *Being mindful of your child’s triggers.* You may not know all of your child’s triggers— and that’s okay. If your child starts having an issue, there may be something that is triggering it. For example, they may have had a past traumatic experience with an adult male and may

not be comfortable with someone you take for granted, such as a male bus driver, guidance counselor, or principal.

Day-to-Day Reminders

When working with schools, keep the following in mind:

- *Maintaining confidentiality.* Your child being in care is private information, not to be shared without proper consent. You may also want to see the Coalition tip sheet, [Respecting the Confidentiality of Children in Care and their Families](#) on this topic.
- *Working with birth parents.* School is a good avenue to team with birth parents to advocate for your child. Birth parents know their children and you can build on that knowledge when working with teachers and other school staff.
- *Setting attainable goals.* Remember your child’s developmental and skill levels and adjust your perceptions. Meet them where they
- *Transitioning.* Transitions are often closely related to triggers. The start of a school year, holidays, and the end of a school year are all transition times and can be a bit of a struggle for your child.
- *Scheduling appointments after school whenever possible.* This helps to prevent disruptions to your child’s regular day and may reduce unwanted questions about why James misses gym each Tuesday.
- *Planning for school routines before school starts.* A few weeks before school starts, begin regular bedtimes, meals, and after school routines. For children who come into your home during the school year, get them into a routine a few days before they start school.
- *Advocating for children in care.* As a foster parent, you know the needs of the child in your care.

Continued on page 3



6682 West Greenfield, Suite 310
Milwaukee, WI 53214
800-762-8063
info@coalitionforfcf.org

© 2011

In partnership with:



The child's parents also provide additional insights that can be beneficial to share with the school staff. It's okay to advocate for what your child needs to be successful in school.

Homework

Designating a homework space and time can help your child stay in a routine and keep a consistent schedule. Some children in care seem to struggle with school work. This may be because of a lack of attendance at school, early trauma, frequent moves, or any number of other reasons. Following are some suggestions to try to help with homework.

- *Break homework into smaller steps.* Sometimes breaking things into smaller steps alleviates stress and anxiety, and keeps students better focused. For example, instead of having your child work on 20 math problems, have him work on five at a time.
- *Remember where your child is at developmentally.* Your child may not be working at the same level as other kids his age. Your child is unique, and may learn in a more non-traditional way.
- *Develop realistic expectations and celebrate accomplishments.* Meet your child where he is and celebrate his accomplishments.
- *Teach organizational skills.* Develop a system for school work going back and forth between home and school. For example, use different colored folders and



notebooks for different classes or subjects.

- *Consider a mentor or a tutor.* A lot of schools have older children who assist younger children with school work. Perhaps your child could be involve with organizations, like the YMCA or Big Brothers and Big Sisters, that provide mentors. Also check with people at your school to see if they can recommend a tutor if needed.
- *Try to keep in mind that some assignments may be emotionally taxing.* Assignments about family trees, Child of the Week, holidays, Mother's Day, and Father's Day are just a few that may be triggers for your child.

School can be a wonderful experience for your child. He may build healthy connections to teachers,

coaches, counselors, and other staff members. Friends and learning social skills are also a good emotional support for him.

But school is sometimes one of the biggest stressors for children and parents alike. Don't hesitate to call us at 1-800-947-8074 for support, understanding, and resources.



Continued on page 4



6682 West Greenfield, Suite 310
Milwaukee, WI 53214
800-762-8063
info@coalitionforcfy.org

© 2011

In partnership with:



Resources

The following tip sheets can be found on our website:

- [Fostering a Child with an IEP](#)
- [Helping Kids in Care Change Schools](#)
- [Respecting the Confidentiality of Children in Care and their Families](#)

Websites with more information on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs):

- www2.ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/iepguide/index.html
- wifacets.org/
- kidshealth.org/parent/growth/learning/iep.html

More tips for school success:

- thespruce.com/foster-care-4127669
- beyondconsequences.com/
- postinstitute.com/



6682 West Greenfield, Suite 310
Milwaukee, WI 53214
800-762-8063
info@coalitionforcyf.org

© 2011

In partnership with:

