



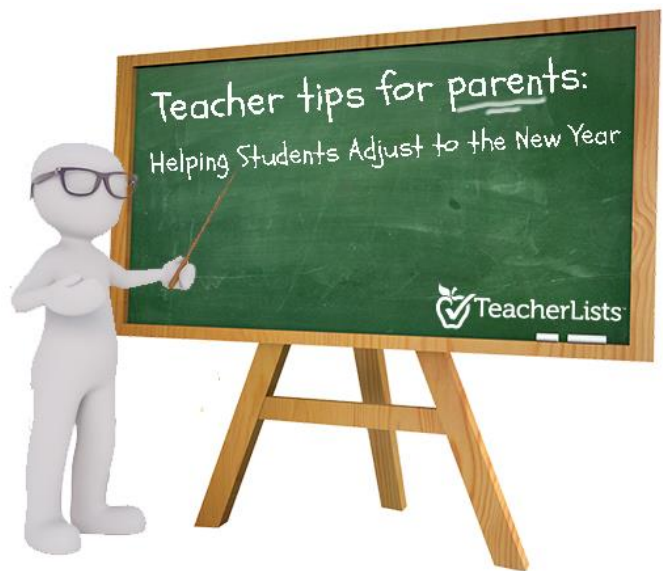
## Helping Students Adjust to the New School Year

The first day of school can be scary. Children wonder about how everything will go— “Will my friends still like me?” “Will I make new friends?” “Do I look okay?” This is completely normal and happens to most students at one time or another. For some kids, though, it doesn’t subside after a few days of school and they continue to have school-related stress. For these children, parents and teachers may need to provide a little extra support.

In general, the types of problems children have with adjusting to the new school year revolve around academic, social, or emotional issues. Here’s a look at each.

### Academic Problems

Academic problems may stem a variety of factors, such as the fact that a new year means a student is working with a new teacher and in a new class environment. Throughout last year, she got to know her teacher, and her teacher got to know her individual needs. When the new year starts, the student might be concerned about developing the same familiarity with her new teacher. Also, the expectations may be much greater this year than the student was anticipating. For example, she may have forgotten some math skills over the summer, and now is expected to know them. Some classrooms are active and busy, but the student works better in a quiet setting. Any one of these might cause her to dislike going to school. The trick is to figure out what is causing her frustration and work to address that concern as a team: teacher, parent, and student.



### Social Issues

Social issues may be keeping a student from adjusting to the new year. If he tells you that he doesn’t have any friends, his anxiety is almost certainly rooted in social problems. In the past, a child who enjoys being by himself or with only one friend may not have developed the skills to make new friends. Experts agree that children don’t need to have a lot of friends to be healthy, but they do need at least one good friend. You can help a student make new friends by role-playing how to talk to someone new. Help him practice asking questions like “Did you go anywhere during summer vacation?” “Do you play any sports?” or “Where did you go to school last year?” Conversation-starters like these can help break the ice. It is also great if a teacher can offer in-class opportunities for students to get to know each other at the start of the year. Creating chances where students are encouraged to work together and have social discussions can help. If a student has switched schools, he may be missing his friends from last year. It’s

important to let her get together with his old friends, but he should also be making new friends at school.

### **Emotional Issues**

Emotional issues might keep a student from adjusting to a new school year. She might be more afraid of change than others are. If you recognize this, try to plan by taking her to the school to visit before the school year starts or reaching out to other students that she could meet and talk to before the first day. If she's moving from a small building to a large one, she may feel insecure. It can take several weeks to feel comfortable getting to the right place at the right time. Teachers might be able to find a friend who can help her if needed.

It is possible a student's trouble adjusting to school has nothing to do with school itself—it might be coming from home. Consider whether anything in the student's household is the source of stress, like a recent move or a new baby. Whatever the cause, the key to a successful year in school is communication between teachers and parents. Both have the student's best interest in mind. Parents and teachers should come together to discuss why a student might be having trouble adjusting to school, and how to best solve the problem.