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Back to school - top tips for a successful new term

As August draws to a close, many parents' thoughts turn to the new academic year. Will my child settle in their new class? Will he or she make new friends? Is it time to consider a new school altogether? These concerns can intensify when you have recently separated from your spouse or partner. But there are ways to make this period a little less daunting.

Team effort

The first day at a new school can be an anxious period for children and parents, particularly if they are separated. Manage your own feelings privately, but try to remain positive and encouraging at all times. If possible, go to the school gates with the other parent. This is a moment in your child's life that you will want to share. It is likely to help ease your child's nerves too.

School ties

A breakdown in the relationship between you and your partner is likely to place a strain on how the two of you communicate. However, it is essential that you keep up to date about your child's academic progress. Arrange to meet your child's teacher early on in the new term, ask for individual copies of school reports and request separate appointments at parents' evenings.

Agree a routine

A new school year or new school brings about new routines for homework, reading and extra curricular activities. It is important - for everyone concerned - that a consistent routine is maintained at both parents' homes. Discuss, agree and enforce new homework routines for your child with the other parent and share the load.

Contact arrangements

New terms, new classes and new after-school activities mean new timetables. Ensure both parents are fully aware of any new arrangements and have an agreement in place about when the child is with you. Plan ahead for unexpected teacher training days. Consider whether the arrangements need to be adjusted to your child's new pattern. Speak to the other parent about this promptly.

Sharing the cost

Class trips, school uniforms, PE kits and, for some, school fees, all add to the cost of parenting. Consider whether these more expensive costs could be shared with the other parent. Are there any items that you could agree over and above the usual child maintenance payments? Plan in advance and ensure you have a contingency in place. And if you are not sure about what the other parent could or should be paying, take advice.

Open communication

Agree a plan for communicating with the other parent which doesn't involve your child fulfilling the role of messenger. It's unfair to ask them to act as a go-between and places too much pressure on them. Exchange information about homework you have done with your child - or other messages you need to relay - over email or via a contact book.

Decisions, decisions

Decisions about your child's education should be made with the involvement of all those with parental responsibility. If you want your child to start a new school, think about the options early, ensure the other parent is kept informed at all times and is also given the chance to visit the schools. If you can't reach an agreement, seek assistance from a third party or consider a mediator to facilitate discussions.

If you would like any information on family law, please contact:

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