



## Preparing for Success as School Ends

Often children who have experienced multiple moves and placements fear the end of school. They have lost so many relationships that the end of the school year is a trigger the relationships that were established this year will end. They often are unable to believe those relationships can and will continue after the summer. In order to decrease reactivity and trauma triggers, the following is recommended.

1. Kindergarten practice. I have found that having the child spend time in the classroom where he will be placed next year decreases anxiety about moving forward. I often recommend developing a systematic plan of introducing the new teacher, eating lunch with the children, and spending time in the new classroom helps decrease ambiguity about what the child will expect in the year to come. Often this type of “hand-off” allows the child to learn to develop a new relationship while simultaneously maintaining an existing relationship.
2. Many children truly desire a positive relationship with their teacher. I often recommend connecting with their previous teacher over the summer. Some students have such positive relationships that they meet for ice cream. Even if teachers cannot connect personally, I recommend that teachers send a postcard to these children indicating they are thinking of them.
3. When the child enters school the next year, they will need to maintain a relationship with their previous teacher. Often I recommend the child having lunch or calling their former teacher a few weeks into the new school year. This allows the child to learn that even though he begins a new relationship, he does not do so at the loss of others. Furthermore, doing so gives the child the former teacher’s “blessing” that he can move forward and will not lose her in the process.
4. Field trips have many variables that scare children who need consistency. School itself is very difficult for some of these children but field trips remove the safety of the structure their school provides. Some children work well if they are in a group with their teacher, their parent, or their aide. If they are not able to stay with an adult trust, I recommend these children have a “safe” buddy who can be with them the entire time. If designating a safe person is not enough to calm his fears, it may be best for that particular child to stay home on days that deviate from his schedule.
5. Unfortunately, two very emotionally charged holidays fall during this time of year, Mother’s Day and Father’s Day. For those of us who have positive relationships with our parents, the holidays are a day of thanking and remembering. However for many children with multiple placements, it often just reminds them they do not have a family, were not wanted or loved, and will never have the relationship with their biological parents that they so deeply desire. When planning such holidays, please keep these deep feelings in mind. Maintain an open dialogue with the child about how other children feel when such holidays exist. If the child exhibits behavioral issues or is withdrawing, ask him if he is thinking



about certain people. “I notice you have been pretty angry lately. Mother’s Day can be pretty hard for some people because they have two moms in mind; their foster mom (adoptive mom, etc.) and their biological mom.” For some children, such holidays are just very difficult. For those children, I recommend creating a new holiday that changes the focus from what the child *doesn’t* have or is missing to something positive. A family can create a new holiday around that time such as “celebrating the flowers that will bloom” or a family can even determine that on the same day each year they will all get a kite and fly the kite as a family. Often changing the focus of the holiday helps the child to have a different focus that does not trigger deeper emotional issues.

6. I often recommend these children take a disposable camera to school. With the direction of the teacher or aide, they should take pictures of teachers, their locker or desk, and important things and people. They should then make a small book with the pictures. This will help them to know the adults understand the importance of their transition and value what is important to them.
7. I often notice my clients deteriorate during the end of the school year. This can also be because teachers are “winding down” and are not as structured as they are during the year. If you sense the school day cannot be as structured and the structure is negatively impacting your child, it may be best to shorten your child’s days or prepare for their school year to end before the last day of school.
8. Some children like the structure of school so much that their behavior increases as soon as school ends. If this resembles your child, then prepare a structured summer schedule for him. I often recommend the child begins a summer program focusing on improving social skills, improving relationships, improving coping skills, or other areas or deficits he may exhibit.
9. Some children thrive once school ends. They often are relieved not to worry about the variables they face on a daily basis. If you sense this is your child, talk with your child once school ends about how you notice a difference when he is in school and when he is out of school. Start to identify why school is so stressful and what you can do as a family and team to help school feel safer for him.