

THINGS WE DID AND THINGS WE WOULD DO NEXT TIME OUR TWEEN IS A NEW GIRL

One month before the first day: get ready.

Make contact with the parents of the new class. This may be something the school organises for you. If not, ask the school to provide you with a contact email address. Often there is a designated Class Rep for just this purpose. We've seen plenty of new Mums make contact over a group email or What's App, and we've done it ourselves, too. Just say Hi, introduce yourself, looking forward to meeting soon. Maybe ask one or two questions about preparations, eg buying uniform. In our experience, less is more - gauge the extent to which the group chat is chatty or practical, go steady.

Sort out uniform. You can check does and don'ts with the school office - are black patent shoes allowed, do trainers need to be white, what uniform is specific and what can be bought from major retailers? Is second-hand uniform available? Second hand sports equipment? Try on new items with your tween, any returns and re-ordering will take a week or so to process.

Plan your diary. Another one for the school secretary is a request for a copy of the school calendar. You don't want to find that you can't make the main social / sporting event of the term. Often there is a September get-together of some kind and this is your opportunity to meet other parents. Look for calendar entries marked for your year group. These may include parent-friendly and school-only events, sometimes there is a calendar code, if in doubt ask, but again go steady, a netball match isn't going to be the main event, a school BBQ might be.

Plan your day. Your pick-up and drop off routines may change, and on the first day you don't want to be running permanently 10 minutes late. Walk or drive the school run on a dummy run, think about traffic points, check out alternative routes.

If there is a school handbook, read it. It is so tempting, I find, to skim read the school bumpf, but I have learnt to read it properly (Louise always reads things properly). What seems like extraneous detail to you may make a difference on the first day to your tween - is correction fluid allowed, are coloured pencils expected, are socks knee-length or ankle-length, are snacks taken in for break time... It's attention to the small print that will help your tween to feel like she is fitting in.

You will probably have been invited to visit the school with your tween, or she will have had a transition day, or similar. But if not, talk to the school about a visit before term starts. Sometimes it can be good to go to the school play or fete or similar, for a quiet familiarisation.

One week before the first day: get your tween ready.

Before this point, your tween is probably still in the thick of whatever she is doing before school starts, so don't focus on school before now, to do so may invite unnecessary anxiety.

If you already know one of your tween's new classmates, a meet up around now will be great. If anyone offers you a meet-up, say yes! But it may not be possible.

Introduce the new school into conversations. Some children respond well to a drip-feed, little and often approach, others will appreciate a good long chat in the car or at bedtime. Allow silences to open up in the conversations, see where your tween wants to go with it, don't talk too much.

Re-vamp your tween's schoolbag with a new key ring on the zip, or a new pencil case. Personally, we would avoid obvious brands and styles and focus on a favourite colour instead: a) we don't like brands and b) your tween wants to fit in, not stand out, so play safe until you know more. Packing the school bag alongside your tween can prompt the conversation you are still trying to have with her, so do it now, not the night before, so that anxieties can be talked through without either of you feeling under pressure.

Try on the new school uniform again. Let your tween get used to how it looks. And how it feels - scratchy labels need to be cut out now, not on the first morning. Pay your tween a compliment - the colour suits her, she looks grown-up, or smart, or ready for serious play action.

The night before the first day - return to our blog post now!