

# First day jitters

Have butterflies set up camp in your little one's stomach as their first day at school looms? Here's how to calm their pre-school nerves.  
Words by *Laura Fulton*

**F**or a lot of kids, the most stressful time of their school year comes before school even starts. Anticipating those first few weeks can be downright traumatising. Here's how the experts suggest you can help your kids deal with those woes.

## Will my teacher like me?

'The best way to deal with fears of a new teacher is to give it some time,' says Martyn Clifford, head of the Elementary Department at Deira International School. 'Every child should be treated like an individual; their teacher should be there for them and respect them.' Encourage your kids to make a good impression, and to treat their teacher with the same kindness and respect they'd like to receive. If your child continues to express concerns that their teacher doesn't like them, make an appointment to talk to the teacher. They may



not be aware there's a problem and will most likely work with you to come to a resolution.

## What should I wear?

'Students can use some unique style elements that are subtle enough to blend nicely with the school uniform and look both appropriate and different,' says AICI-certified image consultant Rana Saab. Start by creating a look book with pictures from magazines or websites of appropriate, stylish looks that will work at school. Not everything trendy will look great on everyone, so consider your child's body shape and colours, and make sure you're within school guidelines. Ultimately, style is about unique elegance and self expression, not fashion statements. 'On days when a uniform is not required, students tend to go to the extreme in expressing their sense of dress. Remember that it's still school – you don't want to shock your peers or teachers by looking like you're dressed for a party, or the gym.'

*For more information on Rana's work, visit [www.ranasaab.com](http://www.ranasaab.com) or call her on 050 474 4037.*

## Will I make friends?

'It's normal for kids to feel insecure,' says clinical psychologist Dr Raymond Hamden. 'Gaining the confidence to walk up to

someone and say hello is a learned process, and it requires positive reinforcement from a child's own experience.' In other words, you can't make your kid friendly or outgoing, but you can help to create circumstances in which they can practise approaching other kids and making friends before they get to school. Parks, nursery schools and play groups are great places for kids to learn how to meet people; once they're able to approach someone, the rest usually comes naturally.  
*Contact Dr Raymond Hamden at the Human Relations Institute on 04 365 8498.*

## What if someone bullies me?

'Tell someone,' says former Dubai American Academy principal Jason McBride. 'Schools set the expectation of what's acceptable and what's not. If kids know bullying is not going to be tolerated, they might still be afraid, but at least they'll know that if it does happen, the school will stop it.' Tell your kids that, if they do get bullied, they should tell the teacher, the teaching assistant, a counsellor, or someone in the office right away. If the school doesn't do enough to end the bullying, parents absolutely must. You can also help your children build the sort of confidence that naturally repels bullies by giving them opportunities to excel. Kids who feel they're accepted and good at something are less likely to become victims.