

# INSIGHTS

by Michael Grose - No. 1 parenting educator



## Making school drop-offs hassle-free

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There are a number of trouble spots for parents, and they have one thing in common. They all occur around a child’s transition from one activity or place to another.

Transitions from play to dinnertime, television to bedtime or from bed to the breakfast table are common battlefields for parents. Kids want to do one thing, yet family requirements mean that they have to do something else.

A battle can ensue with children dawdling, whining or refusing point blank to budge! Parenting is always hard work at these times.

One common transition challenge occurs at school-drop-off time. Some kids are passive resisters on a deliberate go-slow. Others more actively resist their parents’ efforts to get them to school with tears, tantrums or tiredness.

Children’s tears at drop-off time play at the heart strings of compassionate parents, particularly those who feel guilty about leaving their child. Tantrums are another way children keep parents busy and their complaints about being too tired indicate that perhaps an earlier bedtime is in order.

Usually it’s children in the early years of primary school who present most difficulty at school drop-off times. Essentially these drop-off problems are separation issues that can easily be resolved by supportive teachers and some tough love parenting.

It’s worth remembering that a developmental task for children is to separate from their parents, so that they can benefit from being around other adults. Parents who resist this imperative, allowing their child to cling to them are doing their youngster a disservice.

If dropping kids off at school in the morning is a problem here’s a few ideas that may help. Your aim as a parent is to establish a new pattern of behaviour for your child in the morning, particularly as you approach the school gate or classroom door

1. **Go through the morning and drop-off routine** with your kids. Make sure everyone knows what’s expected. Work out your jobs and those that the kids need to do then stick to this arrangement. For instance, it may be your job

to make school lunches but it’s up to kids to put them in their bags.

2. **Drop kids off, turn around and go:** If you have a child who likes to keep you busy each morning with tears or tantrums then you may have to take the ‘tough love’ approach. Say goodbye using a firm voice, turn around and leave. Don’t look back. Most kids settle down at school within five minutes of being dropped off. Parental lingering only makes matters worse for children and teachers. Teachers are experienced at helping kids settle into the school routine, so allow them to take over.
3. **Reaffirm their efforts later:** If your child begins to go off without tears or tantrums after a long period of difficult departures then make a bit of fuss when you see them later in the day. Don’t go overboard with tangible rewards or bribes. Parental recognition, genuinely given is a huge driver for most kids.
4. **Wean your child off you:** If your normal habit is to drop your child off at the classroom door each morning, try saying goodbye at the school gate every now and then. The aim is to make your child less, rather than more reliant on you.

If problems continue then it’s worth consulting your child’s teacher or welfare coordinator, carefully outlining the issue. Be prepared to be coached on this issue, trusting the approach that your school advises.

Teachers generally have experienced this type of separation anxiety before and understand when it’s within children’s capacities and when they may need extra help to cope. It makes good sense to trust their judgement. From my experience, it’s usually spot on!

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