

Stow Munroe Falls City Schools

Kindergarten: A Social-Emotional Guidebook for Parents



Welcome to Stow Munroe Falls City Schools



If you are new to the district, we are excited to have you on our team!

Kindergarten is a milestone for both children and their families. At this time, children develop the crucial skills of reading, writing, and understanding math. But it is also a time where children begin to see themselves socially, emotionally, and personally. As your child journeys down the path to formal schooling, your guidance and responsiveness to these milestones are key to your child's success. This guidebook is intended to help you navigate through some of the most common social-emotional learning (SEL) hallmarks in kindergarten. It also provides some suggestions for preparing your child emotionally for this transition. Kindergarten teachers will share that there are a wide range of "normal" reactions to beginning school and interacting with peers. Our school professionals are prepared to work with a variety of students and will be on your team this coming year.

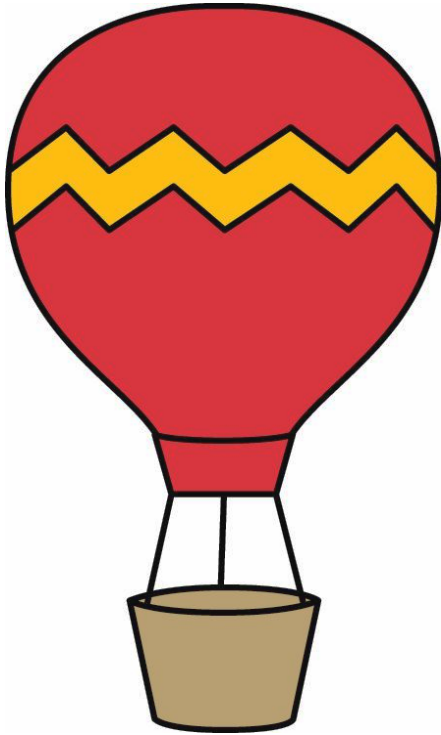
We hope this guidebook will give you the confidence to make this coming school year one of growth for your child.

Stow Munroe Falls City Schools

Separation Anxiety and the 'Hot Air Balloon'

by Laura Swinsburg, School Counselor

Fishcreek and Echo Hills Elementary Schools



One of the most monumental moments

for children is the day they walk through the doors into the unknown land of school. While some children adapt to new places and surroundings easily, others are hesitant or uncomfortable. To make matters more complicated, we adults often carry the memories of our own schooling experiences with us, which may or may not be positive. Because children's feelings and personalities differ from their parents and caretakers, it can be hard to understand when children have differing feelings and thoughts about the first day of school. The following resources and information below are intended to help parents as they prepare for the big "first day."

Off to See the World. Imagine your child is standing in front of a hot air balloon and that balloon opens up into the sky of new and amazing possibilities. Now imagine your child stepping hesitantly into the balloon. He or she may be scared, concerned, or even terrified to tackle such an overwhelming feat. Now picture your child slowly heading up into the air, all the while tethered safely to a rope, which attaches you to him or her. Once airborne, your child will be able to see magnificent views and hopefully, gain some skills to steer the balloon independently.

Kindergarten is often the moment in time where we leave the "comfort of the ground" and find ourselves in a whole new world of possibilities, perspectives and surroundings. And while not every child is thrilled to experience this, the balloon must be free to explore new frontiers. Healthy relationships are built upon an understanding that as a parent or caregiver, your child must begin to function independently and eventually, learn to fly his or her own balloon.

The Rope Transfer. While you are still your child's first mate, navigator, and flight supervisor, our schools have a crew who will hold the balloon's rope to ensure a secure experience while flying.

School counselors, teachers, educational assistants, principals, and other staff members are trained and experienced in a wide variety of scenarios to support students on their first day. As hard as it is to 'hand off the rope', the first day is an opportunity for children to learn, grow, and explore independence necessary for lifetime success. The following page provides resources for 'the first day jitters' for parents and children alike.

In First Time Flying Efforts,


Ms. Laura Swinsburg, M.Ed. LPSC

Licensed Professional School Counselor, Echo Hills and Fishcreek Elementary Schools

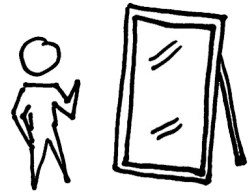
Connect with Your Child's School Counselor for [Additional Resources](#) and contact information on our webpage.

A Word About the *First Day*

When a child is feeling worried, anxious, or uncomfortable, it can be difficult to know what to say or do. Some general suggestions for navigating the first day are below.

- If your child appears anxious, acknowledge the fear or worry, "It is a big change, I can see in your face you feel uncomfortable." Denying or downplaying worry is not helpful, nor is over-discussing the worry or fear.
 - Come to school in the afternoons, evenings, or on the weekend. Have your child walk to the door (on his or her own, with you close by) a few times to build comfort. Discuss the people who work in the building... make the school a familiar place. Sometimes, I have children pick a piece of grass or a stone from our parking area and take it home with them. Find an object or landmark within sight. Some children like to name a tree or object. As you head to school, make the landmark a positive visual—"there's the raccoon picture at school" or, "there's the big oak tree!" This helps them **feel a connection** to the school, which is comforting.
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- Children at age 5 and 6 are excellent *mirrors*. They 'mirror' (pick up on) what they see far better than any other age level. They know when a caregiver is feeling anxious or worried, and this is the perfect storm for your feeling uneasy on the first day. Being aware of your own emotions (and why you may feel them) before the big "first day" can help everyone.



- For many parents, a hug or kiss with an, "I love you, see you soon!" or a short ritual for goodbyes work. Let the children take part in the plan as ownership is a powerful motivator. Prolonging a goodbye discussion may feel comforting, but may prevent a smooth transition in the long term.
- Rather than embracing the mentality, "I don't want my child to struggle" or "I want my child's life to be easy and comfortable", consider adopting a *resiliency* mindset. Resilience is the capacity for us to rebound from difficulties, to have some 'elasticity', not to eradicate challenges, but grow from them. At the corner of resilience and challenges is success.

Some Great Books About Beginning School:

[What to Do When You Don't Want to Be Apart](#)
by Kristen Lavalley and by Silvia Schneider

[Amanda's First Day of School](#)
by Joan Elizabeth Goodman

[The Pigeon Has to Go to School!](#) [\(link\)](#)
by Mo Willems

[Sorry, Grown-Ups, You Can't Go to School!](#) [\(link\)](#)
by Christina Geist

[How to Get Your Teacher Ready](#) [\(link\)](#)
by Jean Reagan

“Showing Up”



Attendance Matters

Being on time and consistent in attending kindergarten is connected with a smoother school transition, lower levels of anxiety, better academic performance (higher reading ability), and higher self-esteem. Conversely, the more hours children are absent, the harder it is for them to adjust to school, befriend peers, and grow academically and socially. Recent state laws on school attendance reflect its importance. For information on attendance, please visit <https://education.ohio.gov/> (key words, absenteeism, school attendance).

Attend today, achieve tomorrow!

Helping Our Children Become Emotionally and Socially Aware

By Kathy Schmidt, School Counselor

Lakeview Intermediate School

Becoming socially/emotionally aware has long been documented as one of the most significant means by which to help our children thrive and function. Understanding the sympathetic nervous system’s “fight or flight” response and its counter response of the parasympathetic override (the “rest, digest, and relax” response) is a lifelong journey that can begin very young. While stressors are inevitable in our lifetime, so too is building a robust response system in children to keep their brains attuned to learning and growing. One of the biggest things that we can do from the time children can speak and listen is to allow them to “listen to their sensations” that their bodies may be sharing (i.e., what their body is telling them when in certain physiological and emotional states). Even asking or sharing aloud, “What sensations (feelings) do you notice right now?” is a primary way to get our children to connect ultimately with the feeling vocabulary that ensues.

Allowing for our children to “*check-in*” with and “*pay attention*” to what their body is telling them strengthens their abilities to manage and cope healthfully. Helping children

identify and bring mindful awareness to their sensory experiences is the foundation of self-regulation. Learning early to pay attention to these sensations helps children better identify what they need (rest, water, sleep, conversation, etc.) so that they can continue to learn and care for themselves. A hungry child may also be grumpy or cranky...a tired child may also be squirmy or unfocused. Nervous children may feel their belly tighten or have shortness of breath. As a parent, teacher, or counselor, we may often be the one to notice what is happening and proceed to help our children to slow down, identify their sensations, and help them figure out what they need. ***But through practice, children can also learn to grow and move through this process. Equally important is that they are attuned when their bodies are relaxed and calm.***

Some statements you can model (say out loud) during uncomfortable times to help your child cope are:

- "I am feeling _____ (upset, hurt, frustrated) right now, I can tell by the way my ____ (neck, chest, head, stomach) feel."
- "I am feeling an uncomfortable feeling..." (help your child to adopt the word *uncomfortable* rather than *good* or *bad*, as 'bad' signals that we shouldn't feel them.. "I need to _____" (insert what you need at that moment, for example, "I am feeling sleepy, I need to rest" or, "I am feeling hungry, I need to eat some food."

Some Final Thoughts From Our Kindergarten Team

"As a kindergarten teacher, it is magical to witness the growth that each child makes in just nine short months. In fact, I find the process to be somewhat of a metamorphosis...they arrive in August as preschool "caterpillars" and are largely dependent on adults and older peers around them. Then, they emerge as independent, beautiful first grade "butterflies" by the year's end, ready to spread their wings and fly on to their next journey." -Ms. Loeffler, Fishcreek Elementary

"If you are a first time kindergarten parent, I urge you to find a mentor parent. Someone who has been through kindergarten before and can help you with your questions and worries. It is also beneficial if you can frame your mindset around assuming positive intentions from the teachers who will engage with your child. Certainly be an advocate for your child, but approach your child's kindergarten teacher assuming they have positive intentions. Building a relationship of trust between parent and teacher will create the best foundation for giving your child a successful year." -Mrs. Sampson, Echo Hills Elementary

"Kindergarten is an amazing year to watch your child grow in many ways. Our days are filled with opportunities that encourage; self independence, discovery, curiosity, and developing a love for learning." -Mrs. Cardarelli, Woodland Elementary

"Kindergarten is a great time to grow in a lot of ways and learn new things about yourself... it is a time to make new friends, try new things, and be curious! "

- Mrs. Miller, Fishcreek & Woodland Elementary Intervention Specialist