

# CHASING SCHOOL BLUES AWAY

TACKLING EMOTIONS AND ADJUSTMENT ISSUES IN CHILDREN ADAPTING TO PRIMARY SCHOOL.



was both excited and apprehensive about starting primary school. To soothe her fears, Ms Tan discussed with Jiaying about what she could look forward to, such as bringing her own lunchbox, and getting her older brother (who is in the same school) to show her where the pick-up point and her classroom were located. Other things that helped Jiaying settle in were reading books about transitioning to primary school, and nightly 'circle time' sessions where Jiaying and her siblings shared highlights from their day at school.

Parental involvement is important in this transition. As a parent volunteer at Ai Tong, Ms Tan joined in her daughter's outdoor learning activities and computer classes. "Jiaying was excited to see me involved in school activities. It also gave me the opportunity to get to know her teachers and classmates better," she says. ●

“Children starting primary school can feel intimidated and overwhelmed as they grapple with a new environment, new teachers and friends, as well as changes to their routines,” says Mdm Diane Goh, principal of Ai Tong School.

They need to orientate themselves in a bigger school compound where they meet new teachers, peers and older children, while adapting to a larger class size and a more formal learning environment. "The intensity of new stimuli, coupled with the longer and structured routine, often leave children drained physically and emotionally by the end of the school day," says Mdm Goh.

## SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Rather than jumping straight into the formal curriculum, Primary 1 teachers at Ai Tong spend class time building up students' social, emotional and self-management skills during

the first few weeks. Lessons involve teaching P1 students how to express and manage uncomfortable feelings, how to start conversations, and how to use positive words or actions to connect with their new classmates.

Peer support can also help children adjust better. Icebreaker games and team-building activities create opportunities for them to forge friendships through play. Since COVID-19, Ai Tong is unable to implement its buddy system of assigning a 'big brother or sister' from an older level to each P1 student. Instead, teachers have paired up more gregarious P1 students with quieter classmates and found this arrangement beneficial to both groups.

## FAMILY PLAYS A VITAL ROLE

Ms Tan Shin Gee, whose daughter entered Ai Tong in 2021, says Jiaying



Having an older brother in the same school helped to ease the transition for Jiaying

“The teachers noticed that Jiaying liked helping others and got her to make friends with the quieter students. This responsibility gave her something to look forward to at school.

**MS TAN SHIN GEE**, mother of Lee Jiaying, 7

## TIPS FOR PARENTS

Principal Mdm Diane Goh shares strategies to help children adapt to primary school.

- ➔ **Focus on your child's adjustment to school during this period, not on their academic performance.**
- ➔ **Ask your child about his school experience to help him make sense of the routines and practices. Acknowledge the challenges he faces and talk about them. Give words of assurance and encouragement.**
- ➔ **Reframe school as a positive learning experience.** Ask your child, "Who did you play with at recess?", "What is one nice thing you said to your friend today?" or "What did you try hard at today?"
- ➔ **Keep abreast of school activities** via the school website and/or notifications. Communicate regularly with your child's teachers.