

# The Wonder of School Drop-Off

**IT WAS MY** first parent-teacher night, one of those small but mighty milestones that make you feel as if you've truly arrived as a mother. I was sitting on a folding chair at the nursery school where my firstborn, then age 2, was enrolled three mornings a week. As the teachers' presentation concluded, a fellow mom raised her hand. "I've noticed that Sophie has been singing songs I don't know," she said. "Could you possibly email out videos of the songs you'll be covering this year so we can sing along at home?"

Before the teachers could answer, a dad across the room chimed in: "Oh, and to piggyback on that, could we also get the titles of all the books in the classroom?"

It had never occurred to me to ask for the names of these books and songs, but now that my peers expressed interest, I wondered if I had been too checked out. The head teacher, Dana, smiled and looked out at the sea of new parents, all sitting at full attention amid bins of Magna-Tiles and dress-up clothes. "I understand wanting to know what the kids are singing and



reading," she started, "and we do send photos, videos, and summaries that tell you quite a lot."

She paused, then bravely went on. "But school is about letting your child live a life beyond you. For two and a half hours, three days a week, your kids get to have experiences that they can share with you—or not. Part of sending your kids to school is about making peace with not knowing."

I had shown up at that school event expecting a baby-carrots-and-hummus buffet and small talk. But I left with a lesson I now revisit every September as my kids, currently 7 and 4, begin a new school year. Inevitably, at some point on the first day, I yearn for the year before, when I still had classroom-door drop-off or "Family Friday" visits or some other way to insert myself into their lives. But then I think back

on Dana's words and realize my diminishing vantage is a good thing. Dropping them off isn't just practice for greater goodbyes to come; it's a chance for my kids to tell their own story.

For the past 18 months, many families across the world have missed out on that opportunity. We overheard every song, math problem, and read-aloud from Zoom screens at our kitchen table. Our kids didn't have to share how school was going because we already knew.

That insider access was eye-opening and—as my 15-year-old self used to say—TMI. What we saw and heard may have warmed our hearts and made us laugh, but it also sent us into spirals of anxiety: How would our kids ever learn to work with others? Were the other students having as hard a time? Why doesn't my child participate more?

As we embark on a live, in-person school year, the relief is palpable. And yet, making peace with "not knowing" may be a particularly tough adjustment for us grown-ups. It's no surprise that in *Parents'* first-ever Back-to-School Survey, 82 percent of parents said they wanted to increase their involvement in their child's school this year. (For more results, see page 37.)

I don't have a magic formula for stepping back without worry, but I do know that it helps to feel prepared. Our back-to-school package (starting on page 32) is a treasure trove of advice crafted to help your family take on this transition confidently and comfortably. You'll find everything from cheerful lunches (page 50) and teacher tips (page 69) to guidance on separation anxiety (page 46) and academic catch-up (page 62).

I hope it inspires you to boldly embrace the mystery of school. And if you're still nervous? Just remember the wise words of Dana.

*Julia*



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There's nothing like the thrill of your child's first "First Day" sign.

➔ We're here to help. Email [JuliaE@parents.com](mailto:JuliaE@parents.com) to tell me about the topics you'd like to see in future issues of *Parents*.