



# Getting ready for school

Starting school is one of those milestones that parents reach with a mixture of emotions. On one side it's incredibly exciting to see your child head off into a new world offering wonderful new experiences. But it's also the distinct end of an era – the baby years are long gone now!

Your child probably feels the same contrasting feelings. School feels like a big adventure they have been heading towards for a long time, but it's also a step into the great unknown. A little bit of preparation can help those first few weeks run a little more smoothly for everyone in the family. Your child's transition to school will be more enjoyable and successful if they feel secure about their new routine and have solid coping skills to get them through the school day.

**Talk about school** but try not to oversell it. Keep school talk to a minimum. We often mistakenly talk too much about school – how wonderful it is, how much they will love it etc. Be bright about it but try not to 'glorify' school. A lot of stress and pressure can arise from all the talk and hype that surrounds a child starting school. Keep the hype minimal as all the talk can set your child up for expectations that are too high to meet.

**It's a good idea to visit the school** to find out what their classroom looks like, have a play on the playground and find out where the toilets are. Most schools have organised visits for new entrants.

**Discuss emergency plans** so your children will know what to do if you're late for pick up or they are approached by strangers.

**Children can be very sensitive** about what they can't do, and this is made more obvious when they observe their peers. Let them know it is okay to not know how to do things because school is a great place to learn new things.

**Have a ritual** worked out about what your child will do once they get to school. "First we'll say hello to the teacher, then hang up your bag on your special hook and then choose an activity to do."

**Fuel them up.** Give them a healthy breakfast and sit down and eat it together if possible. Breakfast provides vital fuel needed to get the body started each day. And remember, quality food builds quality brains.

**Sit down and do some of the things** that your child is doing at school. Children's interest is often engaged when we start it off on our own. Making letters out of play-dough, drawing, cutting things out etc.

**Tell your child when you are leaving the classroom.** There may be initial distress but in the long run it serves your child much better if they know you have gone and do not need to look for you.



A little bit of preparation can make those first weeks run smoothly.

**Give them a hug and a smile** and don't let them see any of your own anxieties.

**Look pleased and excited** when you pick them up. Let them tell you about their day in their own time. Hold back from asking lots of questions just so that you can get reassurance that they have had a good time.

### Before the big day arrives your child needs to be able to:

- Be responsible for all their own clothing. Make sure they choose clothes and shoes they can fasten themselves and understand what to do if they get too hot or too cold. Talk to them about putting their clothes in sensible places at school so they can find them again when they need them or at the end of the day.
- Be thoroughly independent going to the toilet and washing their hands thoroughly afterwards.
- Open and close their bag and lunchbox and understand which food is for morning tea and which should be kept for lunch. Make sure they know what to do with their rubbish. Pack their bag and lunch together so they know what is inside.
- Ask a grown-up for help. Explain that the teacher is there to help. Give them examples of the different words and phrases they will need to use to help the teacher understand what is bothering them.
- Know how to make friends with other children. Good friendships are a lifeline so talk to your child about making friends and about being a good one. Children can be mean and unkind so pass on skills for deflecting and avoiding bullies. Make sure they know where to get help if they get into tricky situations.
- Understand that they need to do what the teacher says, and that children have to take turns talking and doing activities with the teacher.
- Help your child get organised. Establish a school-day routine so they know what is expected of them, and make sure you keep a consistent bedtime routine. Plenty of sleep is essential for a busy school day - aim for at least 11 to 12 hours a night.

## Ready for school

### Give them time

Provide a relaxed atmosphere and a listening ear for your child and encourage them to talk to you about what happened in their school day, both good and bad. Remember that children are good observers but poor interpreters. They will sometimes need your reassurance in order not to take things personally.

Keep your expectations realistic. Remember that school is about fun in these early years. The best learning happens through enthusiasm.

hot tips

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