



Preparing Your Child for the First Day of School (Primary)

The start of the school year can be an exciting, but challenging time for children and parents. Whether your child is starting school for the first time, attending a new school, or returning for a new year there are many things that you can do to ensure that they have a smooth start to the year.



First Timers

Children who are attending school for the first time will need some extra support prior to the first day of school.

You can prepare your child for school by reading books to them about starting school. Some great recommendations are:

- *Pocketful of Kisses*, by Audrey Pen
- *The Kissing Hand*, by Audrey Penn
- *Starting School*, by Jane Goodwin and Anna Walker
- *Maddie's First Day*, by Penny Matthews and Liz Anelli
- *Little Nic's Big Day*, by Nic Naitanui

Try to give your child autonomy over some parts of starting school. Having choices can calm nerves and increase excitement. For example, let them choose their lunchbox or water bottle. The excitement of being able to use their new item may help calm some nerves.

Your child will benefit from rehearsing the skills that they will use during the school day. This may include opening and closing their lunchbox, opening their water bottle, opening and closing their bag, finding items in their bag, and adjusting clothes when using the toilet.

Learning how to get ready for school can take time. Pretend that it is a school day and practice the new routine with your child. You may wish to have a chart to remind your child of the tasks they need to do in the morning.

In the weeks before school starts you may wish to walk or drive past the new school. Point out the school and where their class is. Familiarity with where they are going will reduce your child's worry.

Talk positively to your child about starting school, making new friends, and doing new things. Talk about your positive memories of school; your first day, favourite teacher, or favourite things you did.

Leading up to the Start of School

Before school even goes back it can be beneficial to get into the routine of "school night" bedtimes. Kids who are well rested are ready to learn and are in better control of their emotions.

Talk to your child about their feelings about school, friends, teachers, and new activities. Ask them open ended questions. Listen to them and validate their feelings. Help your child to problem solve if there is something that they are worried about. Be flexible and responsive to your child. Stay calm and consistent even when they express worry. Remember that the first day of school is a big thing for small children – it is similar to an adult starting a new job or moving to a new country.





The First Day of School

It is important to be on time for the start of the school day. Rushing and being late can increase your child's apprehension and worry. Prepare as much as you can the night before. Pack bags, get clothes ready, and check they have all the items needed. Involve your child in choosing what to have in their lunchbox and preparing the lunchbox. This will give them a feeling of control and can help to settle some nervousness.

Make sure that your child knows who will pick them up and from where. Many children are tired after their first day of school so make sure you do not plan anything except some quiet time. Have a snack ready when you pick them up or get them home. Use the walk or drive home to ask them about their day; who did they play with, what was their favourite part of the day, what does school have that home doesn't?

If Your Child Becomes Upset

Please be assured that teachers are used to children being upset at drop off, particularly on the first day, and they are very skilled at dealing with this. If you know that your child has difficulty separating let the teacher know ahead of time if you can.

Have a "goodbye" routine with your child such as: kiss, hug, and say "I'll pick you up at the end of the day". Try not to drag out the goodbye as this can make it harder. If you are concerned or are having difficulty leaving, ask the teaching staff for help. They are very adept at dealing with any upsets.

In the majority of cases some tears and time to adjust is part of the process and not a sign that something is seriously wrong. Talk to the class teacher if your child does not seem to be settling after two weeks.

Parents

The first day of school can be emotional for parents too! Think about how you will manage your own emotions on the day. Plan something nice for yourself after you have dropped your child at school. This may be as simple as getting a coffee on the way to work or enjoying a quiet walk in a park.



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