



Preparing your child for starting school



Starting school is an exciting time for young children and their parents. It can be a daunting time too, but with a little preparation and encouragement, most children will settle in easily at school. Here are some top tips, put together by experienced professionals, to help you prepare your child for starting school.

We hope they help you both start school with a smile!

Don't Worry

Your child doesn't need to be able to read, write or do sums before they start school. Children start school with a wide range of abilities and their teacher will be skilled at helping children progress at their own level. What's most important is that you and your child have fun together in those preschool months and years – sharing stories, singing songs, playing games and talking about anything and everything.

Some Things To Try

(Personal, Social & Emotional Development)

- Chat with your child about starting school. What do they think it will be like? What are they most looking forward to? Is there anything they're unsure or worried about?
- Look at the school's brochure, prospectus or website together and talk about the pictures;
- Find photos of you and other family members at school, and chat about happy memories from your own school days;
- If possible, visit the school with your child before they start – either on formal open days, or fêtes, plays and other events;
- Read books together about starting school;
- If your child seems anxious about school, try focusing on the things they'll like best – maybe the sandpit, playhouse or new friends. Perhaps they have some friends from preschool who will be starting reception at the same time;
- Practise the school morning routine, including getting dressed and eating breakfast in time to leave.
- Practise the school run so that you're both prepared for the school morning journey.

More Things To Try

- If your child has a particular worry – perhaps about wetting themselves, not liking the food, or feeling ill – talk about these concerns with your child and with the class teacher. Provide reassurance by discussing what to do and who to tell in these situations;
- If your child has a favourite security toy or blanket, try to get them used to being without it during the day. Talk to the class teacher to find out if your child is allowed to bring their toy or blanket and leave it in a tray or on their peg;
- If you have arranged childcare before or after school, talk this through with your child. If the childcare arrangement is new, try a settling-in period for this before the school term starts. Try putting together a wallchart of the week to help your child know what to expect.

And Some Things To Avoid

- It's natural to feel nervous about your child starting school, but remember that your child can easily pick up on your emotions. Try to be relaxed and positive, rather than showing your own nerves;
- Try not to make comments such as "I hated school" or "I was rubbish at school", which might give your child a negative attitude;
- Try not to bombard your child with endless talk about school – treating it in a matter-of-fact way rather than focusing on the "big step ahead" will help soothe an anxious child;
- Don't over-hype school, as your little one may feel let down or mistrustful if it doesn't live up to expectations!

Being Prepared

If your child has already spent time in a childcare or preschool setting, they're probably already well on the way to having the social and practical skills they need to succeed at school. They're used to spending time apart from you, mixing with other children, taking instructions from and communicating with other adults, taking some responsibility for tidying up after themselves and looking after their own belongings.

Don't worry if your child hasn't attended a childcare setting or preschool. Playing with other children, whether friends and family members, or other children at the park or soft play area, is all good practice for forming friendships with classmates at school. Often children who don't know one another will make friends very easily, but if your child struggles, teach them some useful phrases such as "can I join in?" or "do you want to share?"

If you already know some other children who will be in your child's class, why not organise a play date or outing together? As well as being beneficial for the youngsters, it's helpful for you to be able to chat about your own feelings and anxieties with their parents, who may be feeling the same.

As the start of term approaches, try to get into the school routine, so your child gets used to getting up, going to bed, and having meals and snacks at the times they will on school days. Bath time and stories instead of TV and tablet games all help children to wind down before bedtime. Making time in the evening to chat about your day for 10 minutes can be a lovely routine for sharing fun times and any worries. Nutritious meals and plenty of sleep will help them to concentrate, learn and thrive at school.

If your child has naps, it would be wise to try phasing this out. This should be more manageable for them if they have a good bedtime routine. Maybe offer a down time after lunch rather than a nap. Some reception classes do provide a space for little ones to nap if needed, but if you can introduce the longer day before the school term starts, it should help with transition.

Help to develop your child's independence and a 'can do' attitude by giving them a few everyday responsibilities as they get closer to school age. Perhaps they could lay the table, feed a pet or put their own laundry away.

Teach them some useful phrases such as 'Can I join in?' or 'Do you want to share?'

Self Care

It will make life easier for your child (and school staff!) if your child can master these self-care skills before they start school:

Going to the toilet

Support your child to be confident about getting to the loo in time and wiping properly, using toilet paper rather than moist wipes. Do you have a different phrase for going to the toilet at home? Letting the class teacher know what this is will ensure they understand what your child is trying to ask.

Washing their hands

Chat about the importance of good handwashing with soap and water, especially after going to the toilet or handling animals.

Dressing and undressing

Let your child practise putting on their school clothes, taking them off and folding them neatly in preparation for PE lessons. Clothes with elastic bands and shoes with Velcro are easier to handle for young children.

Feeding themselves

Free school meals will be available to all children from reception to year 2, but many schools will offer the option of packed lunches, too. Children having school dinners need to be able to use a full-sized knife and fork and carry a plate or tray.

Using a tissue

Introduce your child to the routine of 'catch it, bin it, kill it' – catching their sneeze or runny nose in a tissue, putting it in the bin straight away, then washing hands to kill germs. Some children find nose-blowing difficult, so play games to practise nose control – blowing a feather into the air, for example.

Tidying up

Get your child into the habit of hanging their coat up, putting their toys away, clearing the table, and so on, to prepare them for doing these things at school. Why not turn it into a game? Many schools use a piece of music to indicate tidy up time and motivate children to help.

Have you heard of the 'flip trick' for putting a coat on? Put your child's coat upside down on a table in front of them. They can then put their hands in the armholes and flip the coat over their head.

Your first week checklist

- Do you know exactly where you need to take your child, and at what time?
- Do you know where to collect your child, and at what time?
- Do you know what equipment they'll need for the first few days? (PE kit, book bag, spare clothes and so on) and where to hang them?
- Does your child know who'll be collecting them each day? If they are attending an after-school club, it could be a teacher, an assistant or a member of the after-school club. If it's your regular child-minder, have you reworked your contract to include the school run details?
- Do you know if you take your child into the classroom and settle them, or are they expected to go in on their own?
- Have you put name labels on absolutely everything?! Show your child where the labels are and make sure they are sewn or stuck somewhere that's easy for them to find.

The first few weeks

Many children settle into school life easily, while others take longer. Don't worry if your child is tearful and clingy for the first few days – it's quite normal. Although you might feel terrible leaving them, they will most likely be playing quite happily within a few minutes. If your child seems exhausted at the end of the day, let them have some quiet time or even a nap when they get home. If they're hungry, a healthy snack and drink can help restore energy levels.

Let your child get used to school life before introducing after-school activities. It's a good idea to keep the first few weekends quiet, too, as they will likely need time to recharge, just as we do when we start a new job or a big project.

Keep talking to your child about their feelings about school, and put aside some special time to chat about their day. Some children are

enthusiastic at first, but once the reality of going to school day after day sets in, they can become reluctant. If this happens with your child, use a calendar to help them understand when weekends and holidays are coming up. You might want to arrange a few treats for them to look forward to as well.

Establish a friendly relationship with your child's class teacher, including finding out their preferred times and means of communication. They're experts at helping young children to settle in and thrive at school, and will be able to reassure you about most issues that come up. If you do have any concerns, raise them early to prevent them from developing into bigger problems.

Behaviour change:-

It's quite common for children's behaviour at home to change when they first start school. Don't be surprised if your little one becomes more clingy, argumentative, lethargic, excitable or prone to tantrums for a while.

Literacy - Preparing for Reading

- It is never too early to start looking at books and sharing stories with your child;
- Children who are read to and enjoy books from an early age are most likely to become fluent and successful readers themselves in the future;
- Reading should be fun so sit your child on your knee or close to you while you read so that you can enjoy together;
- Let your child hold the book and encourage him or her to turn the pages in the correct order;
- Talk about the pictures first. Ask questions and listen to what your child has to say about them;
- Relate events to things you have done together and let him/her talk about what they think will happen next;
- Your child may be able to join in the words;
- Encourage your child to re-tell favourite and familiar stories in their own words;
- Taped stories, simple information books and carefully selected comics can add to your child's experience of reading.

These picture books about going to school may be helpful:

- * *Starting school by Janet & Allen Ahlberg*
- * *Harry & the dinosaurs go to school by Ian Whybrow & Adrian Reynolds*
- * *Going to school sticker book and starting school sticker book – Usborne*
- * *Topsy & Tim start school by Jean & Gareth Adamson*

Mark Making and Early Writing

- At first children need plenty of time to explore and experiment making marks on paper with a variety of implements. Try pencils, chalk, wax crayons and felt tips;
- These marks and scribbles have real meaning for children so it is important to praise and value each attempt;
- Children learn about writing by noticing print and watching others write and draw;
- Point out bus or street signs and supermarket labels so that children come to realise that the funny squiggles all around them convey meaning;
- Give children the opportunity to 'write' lists of their own or sign birthday cards and invitations;
- Encourage good pencil control, the tripod grip is the correct hold;
- Activities which help to strengthen fingers and develop the physical skills necessary for writing are important at this stage;
- Make shapes or patterns in shallow trays of dry sand or with paint using fingers;
- If you write anything for your child use small lower case letters.

Mathematics

- Maths is all around us with space, size, pattern and numbers;
- Give opportunities to look for shape and numbers whilst in the outside environment i.e. clocks, road signs, car number plates;
- Provide counting opportunities during everyday activities. i.e. laying the table and shopping;
- Talk about different shaped everyday objects, i.e. cone for an ice-cream, circle for a plate;
- Recite counting rhymes, using fingers to model quantity;
- Pattern - Help to lay the table and notice pattern. i.e. 1 plate, 1 knife, 1 fork for each person;
- Use beads, cotton reels, pasta for repeating patterns and sorting;
- Matching games- sorting pairs of socks, positional language to talk about describing words. i.e. under, in front of;
- Size - Weigh items, fill bags of shopping, use words such as heavy, lighter, full, empty;
- Use words such as big, little, short, long, giant;
- Talk about time with events during the day, this could include sequencing events or a journey.

Communication and Language

- Play games which involve listening for a signal, such as ‘Simon Says’;
- Model being a listener by listening to children and taking account of what they say in your responses to them;
- Use stories from books to focus children’s attention on predictions and explanations, i.e. “Why did the boat tip over?”
- Model language through play, i.e. through stories such as ‘Goldilocks and the Three Bears’ and action songs that require repetition;
- Encourage developing storylines in their play, using words such as: first, last, next, before, after, all, most, some, each, every;
- Support growing ability to express a wide range of feelings orally;
- Talk to children about what they have been doing and help them to reflect upon and explain events, i.e. “You told me this model was going to be a tractor”.

Physical Development

- Encourage movement with controlled effort, and use associated vocabulary such as 'strong', 'firm', 'gentle', 'heavy', 'stretch', 'reach', 'tense' and 'floppy';
- Teach the skills they need to use equipment safely, e.g. cutting with scissors or using tools;
- Ask challenging questions such as "Can you get all the way round the climbing frame without your knees touching it?"
- Plan activities where children can practise moving in different ways and at different speeds, balancing, and target games;
- Provide activities that give children the opportunity and motivation to practise manipulative skills, i.e. cooking, painting, clay and playing instruments.

Expressive Arts and Design

- Talk about ways of finding out what they can do with different media and what happens when they put different things together such as sand, paint and sawdust;
- Plan imaginative, active experiences, such as 'Going on a bear hunt'. Help them remember the actions of the story (We're Going on a Bear Hunt by Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury) and think about the different ways of moving;
- Encourage imagination based on children's current interests such as space travel, zoo animals or shadows, using props at home to support their play. i.e. the table is a cave;
- Play music to encourage free movement and expression.

Understanding the world

- Visit different parts of the local community, including areas where some children may be very knowledgeable, i.e. Chinese restaurant, local church, elders' lunch club, local café;
- Help children to find out about the environment by talking to people, examining photographs and simple maps and visiting local nature areas;
- Give opportunities to design practical, attractive environments, for example, taking care of the flowerbeds or organising equipment outdoors;
- Encourage children to speculate on the reasons why things happen or how things work;
- Encourage children to talk about their own home and community life, and how this compares to others in ways in which they are different and the same.



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We hope you have found this guide useful and you and your child/ren settle into their new school well.