

GETTING READY FOR KINDERGARTEN

A MESSAGE FOR FAMILIES



How can we help our children settle into primary school smoothly?

Think about their emotional wellbeing

Take time to listen to your child and observe how they feel about starting school. Are they excited, anxious, indifferent, or unsure? Listen without rushing to judge or immediately trying to fix things. Sometimes, all a child needs is a comforting hug, just as you would have given when they were younger.

If concerns arise, consider what might be causing them. Common worries include feeling overwhelmed by many children, difficulty relating to the new teacher, or feeling that other children are more confident or knowledgeable.

Decide which concerns might need attention, but try not to react too quickly. An anxious moment may pass, a lost friendship might be restored or replaced, and your child may grow to like and trust their teacher. It's helpful to establish friendly relationships with school staff so you feel confident discussing any concerns and asking for their support.

If separation difficulties persist, don't hesitate to ask for help from your child's teacher and the school Guidance Officer. Discuss with the teacher how best to support your child at the start of each day. Consider providing calming activities if your child becomes upset, such as a walk in the park, spending time with a pet, or sharing a favourite story together. Build your child's confidence by regularly reminding them of what they do well.

Building a Sense of Security

- Make sure your child arrives at school on time each morning, has all the necessary equipment, and enjoys a relaxed, organised start to the day at home.
- Be punctual when collecting your child, especially during the first few weeks.

If someone else is picking up your child, ensure they are informed and that the school has written permission—schools cannot release children to strangers.

- Let your child know what you will be doing during the day, and ensure the school has up-to-date contact numbers, including emergency backups.
- A consistent routine and having the right information will help your child feel more in control and comfortable with the changes a new beginning brings.



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Managing Social Adjustment

Adjusting to life and learning with many other children takes time. Encourage social connections by inviting your child's friends over or arranging to meet another child and their parent for a coffee or playdate.

- Model and talk about being friendly in a balanced way—without always giving in or being bossy. Explain the importance of taking turns and that sometimes we don't always win or get our way.
- Encourage your child to try again, with support, when things go wrong or feel too difficult.
- Young children's friendships often change. Some friendships may last, while others are temporary and based on current interests. Reassure your child that falling out with friends is normal and doesn't mean something is wrong with them.
- However, if you notice your child is pushing others away by being too timid or too dominating, it may be time to help them develop stronger social skills.

Consider Physical Health and Nutrition

- Starting school can be tiring for young children, especially if they attend before/after school or vacation care. The day may feel long, particularly early in the year when your child might be used to naps or quiet 'chill out' time at home or childcare.
- The first thing parents can do is provide their child with some 'down time' as soon as they arrive home—without heavy demands like "Tell me about your day?" This allows them to unwind and feel safe.
- Ensure your child gets plenty of sleep during the school week. Sitting quietly with a parent's warm hug, listening to a favourite story, or enjoying a gentle massage or soothing bath before bedtime can help ease anxiety or over-excitement and promote restful sleep.
- Encourage your child to eat a nutritious breakfast, including fruit and fibre-rich cereals, to provide the energy they need for a busy day of learning and play. Involve them in choosing what goes into their lunchbox—they're more likely to eat what they have picked themselves!
- Support your child to enjoy exercise outdoors, but avoid overloading them with after-school and weekend activities. Children need time simply to 'be' and to relax.
- Discourage late-night TV viewing or the use of digital devices after dinner, as stimulated brain waves can interfere with falling asleep.



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Support Early Learning

Remember, a five-year-old is just that—they are not seven or eight. They deserve space and time to play freely, both alone and with friends, to make up stories and games, to run and climb outdoors, and to experiment with paints, collage, dirt, and sand. There is no evidence that pushing children to develop cognitive skills like reading, writing, and counting too early is beneficial. In fact, 'hot house' learning rarely lasts and may even discourage children from engaging with learning if they feel pressured or fear making mistakes.

Instead, everyday support from parents provides the most lasting benefits. It helps children become confident, capable learners who are willing to explore new ideas, take risks, learn from mistakes, and ask for help when needed.

Parents can support their young child's learning by:

- Reading and sharing stories and information books, talking about the pictures and what's happening.
 - Providing paper, crayons, and paints for writing, drawing, and creating.
 - Modelling the enjoyment and usefulness of literacy—reading timetables and program guides, following recipes, writing shopping lists, and sending emails.
 - Singing and chanting songs, jingles, and rhymes to build 'phonological awareness' through repeated and rhyming words and sounds.
 - Talking about the letters in their name and helping them to write it, without worrying too much about reversed or upside-down letters—this is all part of learning.
 - Providing alphabet and concept books and charts, introducing letters gradually, a few at a time.
 - Asking children to help set the table or share out cake and pizza—teaching one-to-one correspondence and fractions in a real-life context.
 - Pointing out numbers on houses, buses, cars, and products in the supermarket.
 - Encouraging children to use their fingers for counting—this is a smart strategy, and children who use their fingers often do better at maths!
 - Involving children in cooking and talking about weighing ingredients and choosing the right size cake tin.
- By supporting learning in everyday activities, you help foster a lifelong love of learning.



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Keep in Touch and Work with the School

Children do best at school when their parents and teachers work together in partnership and support one another. Keep the school informed about anything happening at home that might affect your child's wellbeing, mood, or ability to learn. Address concerns early—before they become major issues—in a spirit of cooperation and shared problem-solving: “We can solve this together.”

Be ready to support your child's learning without becoming “the teacher.” Gentle, positive encouragement of your child's efforts is more effective than direct instruction. After all, we don't want children to “hate it when mum helps me read.”

Show your support for the school and its activities whenever you can. Volunteer for parent help or canteen duty, take your family to school events, attend important functions like assemblies, and participate in fun-runs or working bees. Whatever works for you, your involvement shows you care about the place where your child spends so much time.

About the Author

Jenni Connor is the author of *Our Child's First Year at School*, published by Early Childhood Australia. She has extensive experience as an early childhood teacher, superintendent, and school principal. Jenni has managed early childhood and equity programs in Tasmania and contributed to national curriculum and literacy education projects for many years.



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THE BIG FIRST DAY



Keep Your School Talk Positive

Speak positively with your child about school and the new experiences ahead. Your words can help them feel more confident, capable, and independent.

Encourage Your Child to Help Prepare

In the days leading up to their first day, encourage your child to pack their own lunch box and school bag. Let them practise organising their belongings and use this time to chat about what they're looking forward to this year. Give them opportunities to solve everyday problems and remind them these skills will be valuable at school.

Ask Your Child to Be the Tour Guide

After the first week, ask your child to show you around their classroom and where they unpack their bag. This helps you connect with them in their new space and supports their sense of independence.

Enjoy This Time—Teachers Certainly Do!

Kindergarten is an important milestone, marking your child's first experience of formal schooling. Kindergarten students absorb new skills and knowledge quickly, and the growth teachers witness is incredibly rewarding. Cherish these moments—this year, you'll see your child make huge strides in their learning.

Be Prepared for Your Child to Share—a Lot!

Kindergarten teachers become pivotal figures in your child's life. Students are often eager to share every detail—what they ate for breakfast, family visitors, or new weekend purchases. It's all part of their excitement and growing communication skills.

Understand the First Day Is a Big Day for Everyone

The first day of school is memorable for parents, teachers, and students. For some parents, this may be the first time they are leaving their child in the care of others, which can feel challenging. Remember, your child is ready for this new adventure—even if you find it harder to let go.

The first day of school is an exciting milestone but can also feel overwhelming for both you and your child. The following tips will help make the day run as smoothly as possible.

The night before:

- Help your child pack their bag the night before to ensure they have everything they need, such as a hat, jumper, water bottle, spare underwear, etc.
- Clearly label every item with your child's name.
- Make sure your child gets a good night's sleep.



THE BIG FIRST DAY

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On the morning of the first day:

- Serve a healthy breakfast.
- Prepare a nutritious lunch and show your child what they will be eating at each food break.

Ensure they can open all containers independently.

• Talk with your child about what they are looking forward to. Reassure them that the teacher will provide instructions throughout the day, including when it's time for food breaks, and that it's okay to ask if they are unsure about anything.

• While your child is still calm, discuss how you will say goodbye so they know what to expect. Let them know you will leave after saying goodbye, even if they feel a little upset. Reassure them that they will be okay.

- Leave plenty of time to get to school, as running late can be stressful for children.

Once at school:

• Show your child where you will pick them up in the afternoon. Remind them where the toilets and water fountains are (if applicable).

• When children head to their classrooms, say goodbye and leave promptly. If your child becomes upset, keep the farewell brief. They will be well looked after and soon distracted by the classroom activities.

- The school will contact you if any issues arise.

After school:

- Please be on time to pick up your child.
- Your child will be brought to the designated pick-up spot with their classroom teacher at the end of the day.
- Spend time asking your child about their day and listen attentively.
- Allow plenty of time for play and rest.

In the following days and weeks:

- Don't be concerned if your child is very tired; this is common as they adjust and may take a few weeks.
- Avoid scheduling too many after-school activities during this adjustment period.
- Try not to keep your child home unnecessarily, as regular attendance supports learning and settling in.
- Speak with your child's teacher if you have any concerns, while also allowing your child time to settle into the new environment.
- Regularly check school communications to stay informed about events and ways you can support your child at home.

We are excited to welcome your child to school and look forward to sharing this journey with you



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PREPEARING FOR KINDERGARTEN

SOME HELPFUL TIPS



Preparing Your Child for Kindergarten

Parents and caregivers can do a lot to help prepare their child before the big “first day.” In the lead-up to starting school, it is beneficial for children to have plenty of opportunities to practise the following skills:

Writing Their Name

- Encourage your child to practise writing their first name, using a capital letter at the beginning and lower case letters for the rest. One of the biggest challenges Prep teachers face is trying to “unteach” the incorrect use of capital letters in names!

Getting Dressed Independently

- Practise putting on and taking off school shoes, socks, jumpers, and raincoats independently.
- Give your child plenty of opportunities to practise tying their shoelaces.

Packing and Carrying Their School Bag

- Familiarise your child with their school bag and give them time to get used to wearing it on their back.
- Show them how to safely take it off and put it on.
- Practise taking their lunch box in and out of the bag and opening and closing zippers.

Wearing a Hat to Play Outside

- Students are required to wear a school hat whenever playing outside. Help your child become familiar with the rule “no hat, no play.”
- When coming indoors, practise putting the hat in a designated place to keep it safe.

Preparing for Eating Breaks

- Make sure your child can open their lunch box and food containers independently.
- Practise unwrapping packed lunches and disposing of rubbish correctly.
- Familiarise your child with different eating times and what is eaten at each (e.g., morning tea, lunch).
- Show your child how to use their drink bottle and bubblers, if applicable.



PREPARING FOR KINDERGARTEN

SOME HELPFUL TIPS



Social Skills

- Provide plenty of opportunities for your child to play cooperatively with other children.
- Practise sharing and taking turns.
- Discuss how their behaviour affects others and encourage them to apologise when they make a mistake.
- Arrange playdates if possible. This also helps your child practice separating from you without distress.

Tidying Up After Themselves

- Encourage your child to put away activities once they finish.

Using the Toilet Independently

- Discuss how toilets are used at school.
- Explain that your child will have regular toilet breaks but must ask the teacher before going at other times.
- For boys, familiarise them with urinals and how to use them correctly.
- Please pack a spare pair of underpants in your child's school bag just in case.

Fine Motor and Gross Motor Skills

- Practise using scissors safely and holding them correctly to cut along straight lines.
- Encourage your child to hold a pencil with control, using the correct grip.
- Support your child to enjoy a variety of indoor and outdoor play that develops balance and coordination.

