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Starting School: How can you help your child get ready to make the transition



What does the research say?

A positive and stress-free start to school can shape a child's impression of education for many years. Transitions can occur at many stages of a child's life, including from primary school to high school, or from high school to post-school options. One of the most important of these transitions is starting primary school. Getting ready for school, or transitioning, is seen as a process that takes place over time, beginning when children start to prepare for school in the home environment, continuing after they start compulsory schooling, and complete only when they have adjusted fully to school.

Early experiences of schooling support children's healthy development and wellbeing, and contribute to children's future expectations and experiences throughout their schooling. Research indicates that a positive start to school is linked to future academic success and achievement, school attendance and completion and lifelong success.¹

Teachers value children being ready for the practical, day-to-day functions of being at school, because these skills help a child adapt and adjust to the demands and routines of school. It improves their teachability and readiness to learn. Parents can support this process by promoting consistent family routines prior to their child starting school, holding conversations about what to expect at school, giving children opportunities to build their independence and embedding skill development into play and regular routines.

The Early Years Learning Framework describes the following factors as important to successful transition into school²:

- building on children's prior and current experiences;
- ensuring children and families have an active role in preparing for the transition;
- assisting children to understand transitions, routines and practices of the settings they are moving to and feel comfortable with this

¹ Hirst, M., Jervis, N., Visagie, K., Sojo, V., & Cavanagh, S. (2011). *Transition to primary school: A review of the literature*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

² Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. (2009a). *Belonging, being & becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved from <https://www.education.gov.au/early-years-learning-framework>

- process;
- helping children negotiate changes in status or identity, especially as they start; and
 - working collaboratively with each new educator and other relevant professionals to make certain that a successful transition occurs.

Parents have a crucial role to play in supporting children through this transitioning process and can nurture the capacities children need to develop to be ready for school. Many researchers have argued that parents are more likely to collaborate with relevant professionals, and to invest time and interest in their children's learning, in the early years.³

Home and school must come together for a child to maximise their potential at school. A significant body of research has found that factors outside of the school, like parent engagement and especially high parent expectations, are responsible for more of a child's learning outcomes than the school.⁴ So, establishing a strong parent-teacher partnership and high level of engagement with your child's education when they start school is crucial to their opportunities to be successful.

Getting your child ready to start school is also often easier if you have another child who has been through the school starting process, or if they have already attended a high-quality preschool or early learning centre. However, it is important to remember that even if you have done this process before, it is the first time for this child.

³ Ayoub, C., & Bartlett, J. D. (2014). *Family engagement and school readiness*. Technical report prepared for the Office of Head Start by the National Centre on Parent, Family and Community Engagement. Retrieved from <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/rtp-school-readiness.pdf>

⁴ Zaglas, W. (2020, April 23). Education expert John Hattie weighs in on the impacts of distance learning. *Education Review*. Retrieved from <https://www.educationreview.com.au/2020/04/education-expert-john-hattie-weighs-in-on-the-impacts-of-distance-learning/>

WHAT CAN PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS DO TO MAKE THE TRANSITION EASIER FOR THEIR CHILD?

Some aspects of being at school can be stressful for a child, where possible, we can prepare and expose them to as much as possible before it starts. Some of the below tips might help:

- ✓ Create and participate in play-based learning scenarios with your child, and look for ways you can build learning into their play.
- ✓ Visit the school and practice school routines, like walking to the classroom and playing on the playground.
- ✓ Have consistent family routines that match what is expected of them at school, such as listening quietly to a story.
- ✓ Arrange playdates with friends the child was attending preschool with or will be attending school with.
- ✓ Discuss your expectations of your child at school and appropriate behaviour. It might be different to the way they behave at home or even at pre-school.
- ✓ Ask your child to practice opening their lunchbox, unwrapping sandwiches and opening drink bottles. These things can be surprisingly upsetting if children are unable to do them for themselves.
- ✓ Have regular positive conversations about school and tell your child how exciting it will be.
- ✓ Teach your child to write and recognise their own name and speak clearly so they can be understood by others.
- ✓ Encourage your child to be independent in age-appropriate ways, like knowing how to take themselves to the toilet without help.
- ✓ Help your child to be independent. For example, they can carry their own bag into school.
- ✓ Give them opportunities to play with lots of other children in a range of settings, and arrange them take turns and resolve conflicts.
- ✓ Engage in school-based transitioning visits, programs, and playgroups that are offered by your child's school.



This guide was written by Dr Amy Graham, UNSW Gonski Institute for Education Research Fellow