

## Starting school: preparing children

### Key points

- **When children are starting school, orientation activities help them get familiar with the school environment.**
- **Practical preparations help too, like organising uniforms, stationery, lunch boxes and bags well ahead of the first day.**
- **School is a big transition. Children might need extra emotional support and rest in the first few weeks.**

### Getting familiar with a new school

In the months and weeks before starting school, it's **good for your child to get familiar with the school environment**. This includes routines and rules as well as the classroom, playground, toilets, drinking fountains and so on.

Here are some ideas:

- If your child is at a preschool or early childhood centre with a **school transition program**, try to make sure your child is at preschool on the days the children visit 'big school'.
- If your child isn't at preschool, **visit the school yourselves**, or see whether the school runs its own transition program.
- Explore the school grounds with your child on the weekends if you can.
- Visit the school and meet your child's teacher if you can. Let your child know that teachers are there to help.
- Show your child where the after-school care service is, if you're using it.
- Make sure your child knows where you'll be picking them up.
- Explain the basic school rules and why rules are important. For example, 'If you want to go to the toilet you need to ask. Otherwise the teacher won't know where you are'.



Good-quality sleep (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/sleep/understanding-sleep/school-age-sleep>), helps your child feel more settled, happy and ready for school. Try to get your child into consistent sleep routines before school starts. This means regular sleep and wake times, even on the weekend.

## Practical preparations for starting school

It's a good idea to have **uniforms, lunch boxes, bags and stationery** ready:

- Get your child to try on the uniform and shoes before the first day, just to make sure everything fits. It's a good idea to have your child wear new school shoes for a few days before school starts and practise doing up laces or buckles.
- Choose a school bag that's comfortable for your child to carry. A backpack with adjustable straps is best.
- Choose a lunch box and drink bottle that has an easy-to-open lid. Your child can practise using the lunch box at preschool, or during a picnic lunch at home or in the park.
- Make sure your child has enough healthy food for both recess and lunch.
- Find out whether your child needs any other items for school – for example, hat, art smock, library bag, pencils, markers, crayons and so on.
- Make sure your child's name is clearly marked on all clothing and other things like their lunch box, drink bottle and school bag.



Sometimes things can get in the way of children starting or going to school. Everyday literacy activities (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/school-learning/literacy-reading-stories/literacy-activities>), numeracy activities (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/school-learning/learning-ideas/maths-at-school>), and play activities (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/activity-guides>), are great ways to support your child's learning and development at home.

## Managing feelings about starting school

Starting school can be a big change for your child, and they might feel a bit anxious as well as excited. Letting your child know that you think they'll go well at school can help them feel positive.

Here are ideas for managing mixed feelings:

- Try to organise playdates with other children before the first day of school. It can help if your child knows another child going to the same school before school starts.
- Give your child plenty of love and support. Be excited and enthusiastic about your child starting school. This sends your child the positive message that school is exciting and that they'll cope and have fun.
- If the topic of school comes up during everyday activities with your child, use this as an opportunity to start a conversation. But follow your child's lead – too much talk about school might make your child feel more anxious.
- Read a children's book about starting school with your child. Reading books about school together can help you talk with your child about their feelings. You could try *Starting school* by Janet and Allen Ahlberg, or *Starting school* by Jane Godwin and Anna Walker.
- Try to see your child off to school with a happy, confident goodbye – and plan something nice for yourself too, like coffee with a friend. Even if you're feeling sad or worried, it can help to keep these feelings from your child.



When your child starts school, it's a big change in your family life. It's normal if you feel a little worried or sad too. Sometimes it helps to talk with other parents about how you're feeling. Other parents might also have helpful tips for preparing and starting school.

### **Starting school: the early weeks**

Your child might need some support when school starts. Here are some simple things you can do to help these first few weeks go smoothly:

- Try to drop off your child at school before the bell goes in the morning. Also pick your child up on time. If you're late it could make your child feel very anxious.
- If your child is worried about being separated from you (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/health-daily-care/school-age-mental-health-concerns/separation-anxiety>), look for ways to distract your child at school drop-off. For example, you could try meeting a friend at the gate or walking to school with another child and parent.
- Make after-school time a bit special, with a snack and time for you and your child to chat.

- Be patient if your child wants to blurt out every little detail about school, or clams up completely. You could try saying something like, 'Tell me one good thing about your day', rather than asking a lot of questions.
- Be flexible with snacks and meals. Your child will probably be very hungry after school. If you give your child a small, healthy snack straight after school, it'll help to keep them going until dinner.
- Don't expect too much academic progress too soon. If your child is happy and seems to be enjoying school, that's a real achievement. The rest will come later.
- Remember that it's common for children to play with many different children and also to play on their own sometimes. It takes a while before they settle into a group of friends.
- If your child doesn't seem to be settling well, or tells you about teasing or bullying (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/school-learning/bullying/bullying-signs>), speak to your child's classroom teacher.



Some children might be tired after school for the first few weeks. Other children might still have the energy for after-school activities. Depending on your child's energy levels after school, you might want to let your child rest and play at home for a few weeks until you think they're ready for playdates and after-school activities.

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## External links

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- [Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia – Starting school with food allergies \(https://allergyfacts.org.au/resources/help-sheets/starting-school-with-food-allergies\)](https://allergyfacts.org.au/resources/help-sheets/starting-school-with-food-allergies)

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