



How to prepare for big school

<https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/families/enewsletter/how-prepare-big-school>

Uniform: check. School bag: check. Social and emotional skills: check? A child faces big changes to their little world when they start primary school. Things like the physical environment, rules and procedures, and expectations to socialise and start formal learning are all-new and can be really daunting. Think about how you've felt starting a new job or going to a party where you don't know anyone. It's even harder for kids as they don't yet have well-developed interpersonal skills.

But don't panic. You just have to look at starting school as a process that starts before the first day and continues on into the school year. It just takes a bit of awareness and preparation on your part to get your darling school-ready. In fact, kids who start off in a positive way are more relaxed, are better learners, have stronger relationships, and generally feel like they belong.

Here's some information to get you in the zone.

Thinking about transition to school

You can make sure your child has the best start possible by supporting their:

- social skills - line up some play dates and encourage sharing and taking turns. Practise the back-and-forth of conversation, and chat about social rules (eg "We have to wait to have our chance to speak, don't we?")
- emotional skills - give them extra warmth and support if they're feeling vulnerable. Show them how to express and label their emotions as they arise (eg "It sounds like you're really *angry* at your brother. Do you want to tell me about it?")
- independence skills - encourage them to take responsibility for tasks (like dressing or going to the toilet by themselves) and to care for their belongings. Let them make small choices (say, about what clothes to wear or snacks to pack) to boost their confidence
- learning skills - help them recognise letters and numbers (not that they need to know how to read or write yet), and to focus on small tasks. Work with them on listening and following instructions (eg "Now that I've shown you how to mix the cordial, let's see if you can do it by yourself!").

See our Starting School resource [Thinking about transition to school](#) for more.

Getting ready for school

Here is a practical guide for the big day and the weeks leading up to it:

- The weeks before - Practise the school run and new routine and see how much time you will need. Visit the school during an open day or on the weekend. Practise their lunchtime routine together (eg

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unwrapping packages and identifying which foods to eat and when).

- The night before - Help them lay out their clothes and pack their bag. Stick to your regular evening routine but prepare to deal with any questions, worries and excitement. Make sure they get a good sleep.
- The first day - Allow more time in the morning. Be positive and manage your own emotions. At the end of the day, don't worry if your child is tired or doesn't want to talk much. Do something nice after school to celebrate!
- Separation distress - First day / week nerves are normal! If they become an ongoing pattern, you can: do the things that usually calm your child; talk to their teacher; continue being positive about school; reassure them you will be back at the end of the day; and (the big one) avoid long goodbyes.

Our Starting School resource [Getting ready for school](#) has the rest.

A change for the whole family

The entire family feels it when a child starts school, including parents! Here are some things to think about:

- Look after your own emotions - Strong feelings about your baby growing up and even your own experience at school can be unexpected and overwhelming. Make sure you can talk to others about your feelings. And be aware that your child may sense your distress which may affect the way they look at school.
- The new routine may be different - You may well need more time in the mornings to get ready and for drop-offs, especially if school is further away, you work, or juggle the routines of multiple children. It's possible you will all be more angsty and tired at first.
- Connecting at school takes time - Feeling comfortable with school staff and other families doesn't happen overnight, so go easy. Chat regularly with your child's teacher so they get to know you and what's going on at home for your child. Attend any information nights, and get involved in social opportunities with other families.

There is lots of information to get you going. Our Starting School resource [A change for the whole family](#) is a great place to start. Or you can browse some [other resources](#) about starting school.

