



# Your Child's First School Routines

*The transition to school is big for your child. He will leave behind familiar routines and people.*

Children react differently to transitions depending on their ages, experiences and personalities. Some may go back to soothing behaviors that they have given up, like thumb sucking. These will probably go away as he gets more comfortable with the new care setting.

When it is time to say goodbye, a 3-year-old may cry or whine. He is still developing his verbal skills. He also has real fears, like whether his parent can find him to pick him up – or if they will forget to pick him up. A 4- or 5-year-old is more verbal and may be more outgoing in sharing his likes and dislikes with you or with his teachers.

## At home

- > Get your child used to other caregivers by having someone else watch him once in a while. This will help him learn goodbye routines – and he will know there's a happy reunion when you pick him up!

- > Talk about the changes in your daily routines. For a young preschooler, you might do this a few days in advance. For an older preschooler or kindergartener, you may want to prepare for new daily routines a week or two in advance.
- > Read books about going to school and starting at a new school to help him become more comfortable with what will happen.
- > Ask about his fears.
- > Ask older siblings if they have ideas for making the transition easier.
- > Create a scrapbook or memory book with pictures of home, your child's new school and people in both settings.
- > Match your child's daily schedule to what will be happen at school. This might mean shifting home nap time closer to the school's and teaching him skills like hand washing,

dressing, undressing and using the toilet without help.

- > At this age, children need 10 to 12 hours of sleep each day. Adjust your child's naptime and bedtime if he'll need to start getting up earlier in the morning.
- > Think about what your child will have for breakfast and plan time for eating. Children learn best when they start the day with a meal that includes protein (eggs, meat, yogurt or peanut butter), fruit and healthy breads or cereals. Avoid high-sugar foods like donuts.
- > Have your child help get ready for his first day. He can help pick out clothes, pack his backpack and choose his lunch or snack.



*You are the key to your child's successful transition! Think about how well your new routines are working and adjust them until you find a good fit for everyone.*





## **Before school starts**

- > Talk in upbeat ways about the new school. Get him excited about it.
- > Go to events for new families like an open house, orientation or support groups.
- > If the new school has a transition team or planning process, attend a meeting.
- > Tour the new school with your child. Take time to explore his classroom.
- > Ask the child's teachers if he can bring an item from home (like a favorite blanket or stuffed animal) to comfort him. You may even want to include a family picture. Some teachers will post them in the classroom for the children to look at anytime they want.
- > If possible, bring your child to your workplace so that he can see where you are during the day.
- > Attend a parent association event at the new school and ask current parents about their transition experience.

## **During the first few days of school**

- > Each morning, talk about what your child can expect and what you will do together when you come back to get him.
- > Arrive on time to allow your child to settle in. Go through daily routines like signing in or putting his belongings away.
- > Take time to greet the teachers. This helps set the tone for your child and also allows you time to communicate each day, if needed.
- > Develop a goodbye ritual that will let your child know you will be coming back and that you love him.
- > Go through a pick-up routine as well. (This includes picking him up when you said you would.) Gather your child's coat and bag and put away materials. Say goodbye to friends and teachers.





# Kindergarten Readiness Starts Early

*Amazingly enough, your child will be starting kindergarten before you know it! You can help by offering many opportunities for him to grow in ways that will lead to academic success later.*

As your child's first teacher, you play an important role in his readiness. This doesn't mean you need a degree in education. In fact, according to teachers, the most important abilities when children start school are not skills like naming letters and counting. What they need are social-emotional abilities like getting along with others and working on their own without disrupting the classroom.

Skills like naming letters and counting are important, of course. But your child learns those and other skills best through play and everyday experiences.

Encourage your child's learning by praising him warmly for trying. Give him helpful suggestions. Answer his questions patiently. Show him how to do things.

If you criticize your child or try to force him to learn something new, he will be less likely to understand and remember.

## Learning through play

Your child learns best through play and first-hand experiences, especially when you allow him to choose activities that interest him.

You may notice your child exploring materials over and over. For example, he might enjoy squeezing, cutting and rolling play dough. He might want to do these activities every day for a while, or several times a day. He is having fun, but he is also learning about the way things look and feel and about mastering a task.

When you play with your child, let him choose what and how to play, then join in the fun! Studies show that children whose parents play with them have better social skills when they start kindergarten.

## Learning through experiences

Include your child in everyday experiences. Talk about what you are doing. A trip to the supermarket can be

a lesson in literacy (reading signs and labels), math (counting and weighing produce), motor skills (lifting items and putting them into the cart) and social-emotional skills (waiting in line).

The more experiences your child is exposed to, the more prepared he will be for school. Examples include:

- > Listening to books, stories and music.
- > Visiting parks, museums, libraries, festivals and concerts.
- > Using paper, pencils, markers, crayons and chalk.
- > Throwing, catching and kicking balls.
- > Pedaling riding toys.
- > Playing tag.
- > Doing water play.
- > Having opportunities to jump, hop and skip.
- > Counting.
- > Building with blocks.
- > Playing "store" and cooking.



- > Playing outdoors, gardening and collecting items like rocks and shells.
- > Putting puzzles together, lacing, drawing, painting and creating with interlocking blocks.
- > Playing with other children.



**REFLECTION**

Take time to think about your child.

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- > How are you helping your child prepare for kindergarten?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- > What challenges do you think your child may face?



- > In which areas do you think your child will do well?





# What Will Be Different for Our Family When School Starts?

*The coming school year marks a big change in your child's life. You may be surprised at how much your life will change as well!*



**REFLECTION**

Take time to think about the transition to school.

Read over these lists. Number the things you will focus on as you prepare your child for the transition, with 1 marking the biggest change. Talk about your plans with your parent educator.

**For my child:**

- New school building
- Size of the classroom
- More classroom structure
- Different equipment
- Less free time
- Longer day
- Different bathrooms
- New playground
- Distance between home and school
- Bus ride

- Walking to and from school
- New peer group
- Eating in a cafeteria
- Less freedom of movement
- Less teacher attention
- New authority figure
- New expectations
- More teachers
- More responsibilities
- Other changes:

**For me:**

- Different routine
- New staff
- Less time in classroom
- Less accessibility to teacher
- More formal communication
- More structure
- Different expectations
- Membership in a parent organization

- Meeting new parents
- More to remember
- Learn new curriculum
- More time alone
- Adjusted home routines
- Less flexibility with family vacations
- Other changes:





# Why Go to School Every Day?

*Now is a good time to get your child into the routine of going to school on time, every day. Being absent too often can cause your child to fall behind in his learning.*

Research shows that children's learning can suffer if they miss too much school. How much is "too much"? Missing school 10 percent of the time is like missing a day or two every few weeks, or 18 days in a 180-day school year. This is called chronic absence.

Being absent more than 10 percent of the time in kindergarten is linked to lower performance in first grade.

Children who miss school during kindergarten and first grade are at risk for not learning basic skills. They are more likely not to read proficiently in third grade.

If children miss a lot of school, it can be hard to catch up with the other students. That, in turn, can make students frustrated about school and more likely to want to stay home. Children with chronic attendance problems are more likely to drop out of school.

If getting your child to school each day is a challenge, talk to the school or your parent educator about it.



## Tips for good attendance

*Good attendance is a healthy lifetime habit for your child. It helps him do better in school – and eventually at work.*

*There are many things you can do to make sure your child is at school every day:*

- > *Stick to bedtime and morning routines.*
- > *Don't let your child stay home unless he is truly sick.*
- > *If your child is worried about school, talk with him about it. Find out why and then take steps to solve the problem.*
- > *Make a back-up plan for transportation to school if something comes up.*
- > *Get immunizations for common illnesses.*
- > *Avoid making appointments for him during school hours.*



*If your child is absent from school, talk to the teacher about what activities he missed and what you can do at home to help him catch up.*





**REFLECTION**

Take time to think about your family's routines.

> Reasons for my child missing school include:

\_\_\_\_\_ Health: My child is often too sick to go to school.

\_\_\_\_\_ Employment: My job makes it difficult to bring my child to school or pick him up on time.

\_\_\_\_\_ Comfort level: My child is anxious and afraid at school.

\_\_\_\_\_ Welcome: I do not feel like a part of the school community.

\_\_\_\_\_ Transportation: Getting to and from school is sometimes a problem.

\_\_\_\_\_ Routines: It is hard for us to get going in the mornings.

\_\_\_\_\_ Transition: My child is too sad when I leave him at school.

\_\_\_\_\_ Another reason:

> I can take action on them by:





# Things to Share With My Child's School

*Your child approaches learning with more enthusiasm when he has strong bonds with his teachers. You help build this relationship when you share his likes, dislikes and temperament.*



## REFLECTION

Take time to plan what you want to share.

- > My child loves learning about:
- > My child loves learning when:
- > My child loves learning with:
- > My child is most curious when:
- > My child is most focused when:
- > My child is most creative and imaginative when:
- > My child shows his love for learning by:
- > You can tell my child needs a break when:

## About your family

*You might also talk with the teacher about:*

- > *The language you speak with your child at home.*
- > *The names you use for familiar people.*
- > *The foods you eat at home.*
- > *The ways your child plays when he's in a group.*
- > *How you handle it when your child gets in trouble.*
- > *Special customs, rituals and holidays your family observes.*





# Ways to Be Involved in Your Child's Education

*Think about the many ways you are active and engaged in your child's education. What are you doing already? What would you like to try?*

## Parenting

- \_\_\_\_\_ I take care of my child's needs so she can make the most of her time at school.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I make sure she gets enough sleep, eats healthy foods, goes to the doctor and has a safe, loving home.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I set a schedule for meals, play time and work time.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I limit how much time "screen time" my child can spend on the TV, computer or video games.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I set limits for my child's behavior.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I give her responsibilities.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I model respect, honesty and politeness.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I get to know the families of my child's classmates to share experiences and support.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I'm learning about the school's expectations for behavior and learning.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have thought about our own values and family culture.

## Communicating

- \_\_\_\_\_ I respond to notes, calls and e-mails from school.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I share information about my child's personality with her teachers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I talk to them about her grades, homework or problems she's having in school.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I come to parent-teacher conferences with a list of questions and follow up on the teacher's suggestions.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I help my child understand what is expected of her at school.

## Volunteering

- \_\_\_\_\_ I have signed up for volunteer opportunities.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I help out from home by preparing materials for the teacher.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I chaperone field trips.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I help out in my child's classroom or in the school building.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I come to school for classroom events.

## Learning at home

- \_\_\_\_\_ I display my child's schoolwork to show her I am proud of her.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I help with homework (but not too much!) and promote good study skills.
- \_\_\_\_\_ There is a space in our home where my child has supplies like paper and markers ready.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I understand the school's learning standards.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I attend school events to learn what my child is studying and how I can support her.

## Decision making

- \_\_\_\_\_ I know who to call or e-mail with my thoughts and concerns.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I know the process for addressing problems.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I serve in the parent association or on a committee.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have attended workshops that teach problem-solving skills, leadership skills or communication skills.





## **Collaborating with the community**

- \_\_\_\_\_ I help spread the word about what the school is doing by telling friends and family or putting it on social media.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have gotten my workplace involved in my child's school through donations.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I participate in school-community festivals, book fairs or service projects.





# How to Talk to Teachers

*Teachers take classes on how to communicate with parents. You haven't had this training, but you do know what you want for your child: a successful year of learning. And you want to be able to communicate with the teacher about it!*

It's good to look at your relationship with the teacher as a partnership. You each need reassurance from each other. You don't need distrust, uncertainty, inadequacy or even intimidation.

Two important things to remember about your parent-teacher partnership:

1. Your child is unique. He has his own set of strengths and challenges that can be looked at and addressed in a variety of ways.
2. You know your child as a person. The teacher will come to know him as a "citizen" of the classroom and school community. Because of both perspectives, you can each learn from one another about how to best meet your child's social, emotional and educational needs.

## Reaching out to your child's teacher

Getting acquainted with your child's teacher can help everyone adjust – you, your child and his teacher.

The teacher sees your child's strengths and challenges at his age and grade

level. But you know a lot about your child's personality and how he learns. You can develop a system for passing this information to his teacher and hearing back about how he's adjusting.

You can connect with the teacher by:

- > **Asking when and how the teacher prefers to stay in touch.** This may be e-mail, phone calls, text messages, backpack notes or conversations at drop-off or pick-up times.
- > **Shortly after school begins, sending a short note to the teacher to let her know how your child is adjusting.** If you want to hear back, tell her. If your child seems to have trouble transitioning, you may want to set up a one-on-one appointment so you can talk without interruption.
- > **Reflecting on the teacher's thoughts, suggestions and questions for you.** Take notes and think about how her advice will help your child. Ask question about things that may not be clear.

- > **Sharing information about your child that will help the teacher understand his needs and support his strengths.** Ask how you can support your child's classroom needs at home.







- > **Attending the back-to-school night or other event where the teachers explain the day-to-day classroom routines.** These are usually held during the first month of school. They're a good chance to meet other parents and teachers.
- > **Keeping track of your questions.** Bring them to conferences or send them to the teacher.





### What do we have?

- > Items found at school (pencil, paper, books and so on)
- > Table or desk
- > Book about going to school



### Book sharing

*Ask your child to describe what he sees in the pictures about going to school. How does it compare to his new school (or to other schools he has visited)?*

*Encourage him to talk about emotions related to school:  
“How do the characters feel about going to school?”  
“How do you feel?”*

# Let's Play School: Pretending and Role Playing

## How do we do it?

1. Suggest that you play school together. Have your child collect items from around the house that would be in a school. “What do you see at school?” If your child hasn't been to school before, find out his thoughts: “What do children do at school?” or “What might school be like?”
2. Ask your child to explain why he chose the items and how they're used.
3. Next, sit at the end of the table and pretend to be people at school. Ask him who he is and who you are. “If you're the teacher, who would you like me to be?”
4. Follow your child's lead and act out the stories he creates.
5. Extend his play with questions: “What are we going to learn next?” or “What do students do with this at school?”
6. The stories your child acts out can give you insight into how he feels about school. Does he act happy or concerned? Use your observations during a follow-up conversation about school.
7. Continue playing until your child loses interest.

## What's in it for us?

### Cognitive

- a. Children use their imaginations to build on experiences they have had. If they've been to school, their play will more accurately reflect real life.
- b. Children often act out their fears and expectations of a new situation when they engage in pretend play.
- c. Children begin to realize that objects (like props and costumes in pretend play) can represent ideas. This is called **symbolic representation**.

### Connecting across development

- > **Language:** Pretend play encourages children to develop new vocabulary that describes experiences they are acting.
- > **Social-emotional:** As children grow older, they are better at communicating their ideas and allowing others to pretend along with them.
- > **Motor:** While playing school, children may practice holding a pencil or crayon while writing or coloring. As the small muscles in the hand get stronger, children have more control over their grip.





## ACTIVITY *page*

### What do we have?

- > Photo of your child's new school (optional)
- > Crayons or markers
- > Magazine or catalog with pictures of school supplies
- > Sturdy paper such as file folders or thin cardboard
- > Photo of your child
- > Safety scissors
- > Glue stick
- > Masking or duct tape
- > Book about starting school



### Book sharing

*Help your child identify any feelings the characters express about starting school. (Fear? Excitement? Pride?) Encourage your child to share her own feelings about school.*

# Ready for School! Preparing for Kindergarten and Making a Book

### How do we do it?

1. If possible, visit your child's school to take a picture for the book. (Or, if the school has a website, print photos of it.)
2. Talk with your child about what she might see there. Suggest things that may be unfamiliar, like desks, whiteboards or a cafeteria.
3. Have your child cut out or draw pictures of things she might find there. Follow her lead about what to include. Ask, "What do you think will be in your classroom?"
4. Let your child glue the pictures onto the paper. Encourage her to write something on each page.
5. Remind her to write her name on the cover. Help her brainstorm ideas for a title and write it on the cover.
6. Tape the book pages together.
7. Read the book with your child and talk about each picture. Encourage her to share the book with other family members.

### What's in it for us?

#### Social-emotional

- a. Making a book about starting kindergarten allows children to imagine what might happen and express their feelings in advance.
- b. When children know what to expect before facing a new situation, they often feel more comfortable.
- c. Becoming familiar with their new school ahead of time may make it easier for children to transition on the first day.

#### Connecting across development

- > **Cognitive:** When children make a book about school, they are learning how to sort and classify the things they will see there.
- > **Language:** Talking with children about their expectations for kindergarten encourages them to express their feelings with words.
- > **Motor:** Cutting and gluing pictures and turning the pages of the book exercise the fine muscles in children's hands and fingers.



### Safety tip

*Never leave your child alone while using scissors.*