



Thinking about transition to school

<https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/mental-health-matters/starting-school/thinking-about-transition-school>



Starting school is an important time for children and families. Children who make a positive start to school are more likely to:

- feel comfortable, relaxed and valued
- feel excited and motivated to learn
- have good relationships with others
- develop a sense of belonging within the school community.

Starting school is not just about the first day. It's a process that begins when children and families start to prepare in the year before, and continues as children experience their first days, weeks and months of school. The process involves a number of changes for children and families, and everyone reacts differently.

For some children the change brings excitement about making friends and learning new things, while for others the change can leave them feeling nervous and overwhelmed. You may reflect on your own school experiences and be reminded of the mix of emotions you felt when starting school.

Families play an important role in supporting children to manage the transition to primary school. With the support of your child's early childhood educator and school teacher, you can help them to cope with

the new challenges by developing their social, emotional and learning skills. Supporting your child's skills in these areas contributes to their mental health and wellbeing.

Children who are mentally healthy are better learners, have stronger relationships and are better able to meet life's challenges.

The main changes for your child

Starting school involves a number of changes for children and families. This includes the differences between your child's current setting (eg home, long day care, preschool) and the primary school they will be attending. When children start school they experience changes in the following areas.

Physical environment: For example, the size of the playground, classroom and school buildings, the location and types of toilets, the number of other children and teachers.

Rules and procedures: For example, more structured times for attending class, eating and going to the toilet, rules for different places such as the classroom and playground, lining up and putting up a hand to speak.

Relationships: For example, meeting new children and adults, responding to children of different ages, leaving an early childhood educator, getting to know a range of teachers for different subjects and from different grades.

Learning: For example, more formal learning experiences, structured times and set tasks, increasing independence.

Managing change during transition

Learning from other transitions

Your child has most likely already experienced several transitions in their life. These may include starting preschool, going on holiday, moving house or welcoming the addition of a new brother or sister. These experiences can help children develop skills for managing new situations such as starting school. They can also help you get to know how your child copes with change. You may like to think about:

- What has helped your child manage other transitions and changes in their life?
- How have you supported them to cope?
- How can you utilise your child's early childhood educator and school teacher to support this process?

Using your child's strengths and skills

Throughout your child's early years they have been learning and developing a range of skills. Every child is different. They each have their own strengths that can help them manage change when starting school.

The following provides you with some ideas for helping your child manage change and build on their social and emotional, independence and learning skills. Many of the suggestions will be things that you are already doing, and your child will keep progressing in these areas when they start school. You may like to choose one or two skills to focus on over the next few months. Choosing a small number of skills is important as you do not want to overwhelm your child in the lead up to starting school.

Social and emotional skills

Teach friendship skills: Teach your child ways to introduce themselves to new children, join in play with others and be friendly and co-operative. Talk to your child about what being a good friend means (eg

sharing, taking turns at choosing a play activity, using kind words).

Encourage sharing and taking turns Playing with your child, following their lead and having fun together will help develop their social skills. Playing simple board games, card games or computer games with children helps them to develop sharing and turn taking skills. It also helps children to cope with disappointment when they do not always win.

Invite children to play together Arranging for your child to get together with other children helps them to establish friendships and practise their social skills. Providing positive guidance and helping to structure activities (eg using blocks to build a tower together) can be helpful when supporting children to establish new friendships.

Involve your child in conversations Talking with your child and involving them in conversations can help them to learn the rules of communication such as waiting for a turn, expressing ideas and listening without interrupting.

Help your child to manage their emotions Emotional skills include being able to recognise, express, understand and manage a wide range of feelings. You can promote your child's emotional development by spending time with them and being warm and responsive to their needs. Talk to your child about what is happening and help them to describe and label the emotions they are feeling.

Get to know other families in the school community Arranging to meet with other families in the school community prior to starting school will help develop relationships and a sense of connectedness to the school community.

Independence skills

Encourage self-help skills These skills include your child dressing and undressing themselves, eating from their lunch box, going to the toilet and asking for help. Encouraging your child to develop these skills will give them lots of confidence in being able to do things for themselves.

Promote a sense of responsibility Encouraging your child to take responsibility for small tasks (eg setting the table for dinner, putting their clothes in the wash basket) will help them feel useful and build their self-confidence.

Teach your child to care for their belongings Encourage your child to care for and respect their belongings (eg tidying up toys, putting pencils back in their pencil case).

Involve your child in making decisions Providing your child with simple choices will give them practice for decisions they may need to make at school. Start with giving two choices such as the red or the blue top when getting dressed or an apple or banana for a snack. This will give them the confidence to make bigger decisions.

Develop your child's understanding of social rules Talk to your child about how different settings have different rules and expectations (eg rules at preschool, rules around a swimming pool to keep everyone safe). This will help them adjust to some new rules they will need to learn to remember and follow at school.

Learning skills

Introduce early literacy and numeracy skills These include your child recognising numbers and letters, and counting and writing their own name. Introduce the concept of counting and letter recognition through everyday activities. For example, count the number of toys on the floor, point to words when reading aloud to your child, sing songs, say nursery rhymes and foster an enjoyment of listening to stories. Remember, children will get plenty of practice with reading and writing once they start school.

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Encourage your child to focus on an activity: Encourage your child to sit and focus on an activity for a period of time (eg making a house from blocks, building a racing track, drawing a picture, doing a puzzle). Your child may benefit from you sitting with them or checking back at regular intervals to provide positive encouragement and feedback as they concentrate and enjoy themselves. For example, you might say, "wow, look at the size of the house you built! Could we add a fence or garden?"

Encourage listening skills: Reading books or listening to CD or DVD recordings of stories is a great way to help develop your child's listening skills. Asking questions about the story can also support your child's understanding and communication skills. For example, ask questions about what has happened, what might happen next or how characters might be feeling. To promote curiosity, you might ask, "I wonder what would happen if...?"

Help your child to follow instructions: Start by giving your child one instruction to follow (eg get your socks) and walk with them to do it if necessary. You can then build up to giving your child two-step instructions (eg put your dish in the sink and get your socks). Children often have difficulty remembering more than two or three instructions at a time.

Promote a hands-on approach to learning: Learning occurs through everyday play and experiences. Providing opportunities to experience new places, such as going to the library to look for books, visiting places in the community and following your child's interests (eg looking for bugs with lots of legs), will show them that learning is fun. 'Make-believe' play, such as when children pretend to be characters, encourages their imagination and creative skills. Materials such as empty boxes, writing materials and dress-up clothes can help to support make-believe play.

Encourage hand-eye coordination: Using scissors and glue, drawing, building with blocks, helping with cooking (stirring and pouring), and throwing and catching balls can help children to learn and practise hand-eye coordination, which is important as they learn to read and write.

See also:

[Getting ready for school](#)

[Getting help when starting school](#)

[Starting school: Further resources](#)

