



## The Education Leader Insert: Starting School; Supporting your child and what to expect!

Starting school is an important step in a young child's life and 'Is my child ready for school?' is a question asked by many parents. Your child can start Kindergarten at the beginning of the school year if they turn five on or before 31 July in that year (note this is for public schools and some private schools vary). By law, all children must be enrolled in school by their sixth birthday.

**When to Enrol:** Kindergarten enrolment usually begins around April the year before your child will start Kindergarten. Schools will often advertise when they are taking enrolments or you can contact the school you are interested in attending to find out about enrolling your child. When to start your child at school is an individual decision, you may want to discuss this with your child's FDC educator; Preschool educator or doctor as children develop at different rates and learn skills in different ways.

**Orientation Day:** Most schools have orientation days towards the end of the previous year to welcome children to Kindergarten. Many schools also have transition to Kindergarten programs over several weeks in the second part of the year, contact your local school for details. School orientation sessions provide a great opportunity for staff to get to know your child and for your child to meet other children who will start school at the same time. It's important that you tell the principal if your child has any special circumstances, allergies, health or medical conditions before your child starts school.

**Enrolment Appointments:** If your child has **not** been previously enrolled in a NSW public school, you will need to bring these documents with you:

- your child's birth certificate or identity documents proof of your child's address - originals of different documents such as your council rates notice or residential lease and electricity bill
- immunisation history statement based on the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register (ACIR)
- family law or other relevant court orders (if applicable)

If your child is **not a permanent resident** you will also need to provide a passport or travel documents plus a current visa and previous visas (if applicable).

As parents you can make a big difference in helping to prepare your child for school, consider these suggestions:

**Talking** with your child in a positive / cheerful way about starting school plus monitor your child's response to conversations about school. Do they react enthusiastically, or with confusion or anxiety? Do they seem to want more information? Keep in mind that children may find it hard to think ahead about future events in terms of weeks and months, to help your child to understand time concepts it can help to talk about days of the week and use a calendar to count down the days until schools starts.

Books are a great way for your child to become familiar with new routines, including school. Many children benefit from sharing a book that has been made especially for them about starting school. You can create a story for your child about starting school by downloading the "[My new school](#)" story template and personalise it with photos of your child and his or her new school. Reading the "[My new school](#)" story with your child regularly during the weeks before school commences and being prepared to answer questions that your child asks about school can assist your child. Some other helpful books include "First Day", by Andrew Daddo and Jonathan Bentley, "Starting school" by Jane Godwin and Anna Walker, "Wombat Goes to School" by Jackie French and Bruce Whatley, "Tom goes to kindergarten" by Margaret Wild and David Legge, "I Am Absolutely Too Small for School" by Lauren Child, "First Day Jitters" by Julie Dannenberg, and "Starting school" by Janet and Allen Ahlberg.

**Additional visits to the school** might also help meet your child's needs, for example, watching a sport lesson or school assembly. In addition offering other opportunities to socialise in your local community e.g. playgroups or story-time at the local library can assist your child with the transition. If your child is at a preschool 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 if the school runs its own transition day. This helps your child get familiar with the grounds, the classroom, the toilets, the bubblers or drinking fountains, the noise of the big kids and so on.

**Help your child to practice:** A little advance preparation can make the first week a lot easier for you and your child as you prepare for the big day:

- Using public toilets and explain that at school there are separate toilets for girls and boys
- Practice skills such as opening and shutting toilet locks, pulling up pants before leaving the toilet cubicle, using a urinal
- Practice packing and unpacking the backpack they will be using for school. Is the backpack easily recognised as theirs?
- Eating recess/lunch foods out of their school lunchbox (use a lunchbox and packaging which is as easy as possible to open and close). **Continued next page: -**





- Allow your child to try on the uniform and shoes before the first day, just to make sure everything fits. It's a good idea for your child wear new school shoes for a few days before school starts plus practice taking on and off their school shoes and sports shoes.
- Make sure your child has all the extras – bag, hat, art smock, library bag and so on.
- Play games where people have to raise their hand to say something and wait for their turn to participate. It helps children understand that not everyone gets a chance to talk every time in a classroom even though they may put up their hand.
- Assist your child in calming techniques when they are upset using age appropriate activities which are soothing. E.g. cuddling a soft toy, squeezing a stress ball, having a drink of water or learning to wipe their eyes with a tissue.
- Practice going to school, you can make a dry run to help your child get familiar with the route and the routine. Point out interesting sights or places familiar to your child. Notice the swings, slides, or other fun stuff that you think your child will like – and try them out together.
- Describe what will happen on the first day, keeping in mind that a child starting school for the first time or going to a new school may have a hard time imagining what it will be like (You've been to school before, but they haven't.) "Talking about the basic sequence of the day will help your child make a mental movie of what to expect. Kids form pictures in their minds, and reviewing the process in detail will make things more familiar and less scary on the first day of school," advises Diane Levin, Ph.D., Professor of Education at Wheelock College.
- Ask your child compelling questions as this will help your child imagine what school will be like and help you talk about the fun and hard stuff. You might ask: "What do you think the hardest part of school is going to be?", "Is there anything that worries you about starting school?", "What are you really looking forward to?"
- Begin starting to go to bed earlier one or two weeks before school begins. Roll bedtime back to a school schedule, begin slowly, waking your child up 15 minutes earlier every day and going to bed 15 minutes earlier each night.
- Try meeting the children in the class. If your child is going to a new school, find out if there will be an orientation before the first day; it can be helpful to see familiar faces when he/she walks into a new classroom. Even if your child already has friends at school, schedule some play dates with children your child may not have seen over the summer.
- Learn about the drop-off policy and find out about the policy for parents walking children into the classroom and how long you can stay. If you expect that your child will need extra time to adjust, talk to the teacher if you can before school starts.
- Give your child control over what they can control. Offering simple choices may help calm nerves and get children excited. E.g., if you pick out a new backpack or lunchbox, let your child choose the colour, if you shop for school supplies, let your child find the items in the store and check them off on your list.
- Plan ahead how you will say goodbye by what your child needs in a goodbye. - a quick goodbye, or five minutes of cuddle time with you?
- Try to get familiar with school and meet your child's teacher together and give your child an idea of how many children will be in the class. Let your child know that teachers are there to help and she can ask for help any time.
- Explain the basic school rules of school to your child, like putting up your hand, asking before going to the toilet, listening quietly when you need to, and doing what the teacher asks.
- Show your child where the after-school care facilities are, if you're using them.
- Make sure your child knows where you'll be picking him up or where to go to catch a bus.

**Feelings:** Think about how you'll manage your feelings on the first day. Even if you're feeling sad or worried, it can help to keep these feelings from your child. Instead, try to see your child off with a happy, confident goodbye – and plan something nice for yourself too, like coffee with a friend.

**Finally, when the big day arrives** be as prepared as possible for the "before school" morning routine and remain as calm as possible in your interactions with your child. This will help to reduce additional stress which may be caused by being rushed or agitated, remember that children pick up on their parents' feelings and behaviour. Starting school can be a big change for your child – and a big change in your family life too. Although it's an exciting time, it's normal to feel a little worried or sad about it.

**Resource:**

<http://www.transitiontoschoolresource.org.au/tts-content/activities-to-help-prepare-your-child-for-school>

[http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/starting\\_school.html](http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/starting_school.html)

