



Starting School

Starting school is an exciting time of change for children and families. There are many things you can do to prepare for the changes. Helping children to feel confident and positive about school will give them a good start.

A time of change

When children start school, they have a lot to get used to. They will be in a new setting, with more children and new rules and routines. Some children will manage this easily while others may need more help from parents and teachers.

When will my child start school?

Children in England must be enrolled in Primary School by their fifth birthday. Most children start school full-time in the September after they have their fourth birthday.

Orientation to school

Many schools, preschools and childcare centres help children during their transition to school. They arrange programs which may include:

- visits to the school and/or transition days
- walks around the school to see where things are, eg playgrounds, toilets
- spending time in a classroom with teachers and other children.

There may be time for parents to meet staff members and ask questions too.

Building confidence

There are things parents can do to help children feel confident and optimistic about starting school. You could talk with them about what school will be like. Borrow books from the library with positive stories about starting school. Maybe share some happy stories from your own school days.

Parents can also help children to build confidence and optimism by encouraging a habit of positive thinking. Asking children to tell you about the good things that happen each day helps develop this healthy habit.

Getting ready

To prepare children for school you could:

- involve your child in preparing for school, eg shopping for their uniform, school bag and lunch box. Make sure they can manage their lunchbox and school bag
- plan for healthy lunches, snacks and water to drink
- help your child learn to dress themselves, and to use the toilet on their own
- establish the bedtime and morning routine that they will have when they start school. It is very important that they get enough sleep
- practise the route you will take when you walk, drive or ride to school
- plan to take your child to school on the first day. Show them where you will pick them up at the end of the day. Make sure you are always on time. A few minutes can seem like a long time to a young child.

If your child is worried, ask them what would help, eg who should take them to school, where they want to say goodbye, what they want to do after school. Having some control can help children manage their fears.

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There is a lot for children to get used to when they start school. Some will adapt more easily than others.
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Relax! If you are stressed, your child may sense this and worry too.

Working with the school

It is important for parents and teachers to work together and communicate well.

It can help if you:

- let the teacher know if there is something happening at home that may be affecting your child
- let them know about any health problems your child may have
- read all the school notices and reply as soon as possible
- get involved in school activities, eg listen to children's reading if you can
- talk to your child about what they are learning at school
- encourage your child to share their interest and experiences with their teacher.

Make an appointment to see the teacher if you are concerned about your child.

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Children do best at school when their parents and teachers work together to support them.
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The first few weeks

As your child settles into school:

- they may be tired at the end of the day. Don't plan too many after-school activities; make sure they have time to rest and for free play
- they may be 'starving' after school. Take a healthy snack when you pick them up. Try giving them an early dinner as they may be too tired to eat later
- they may want to tell you all about their day as soon as they see you. Be available to listen. Some children may want to relax first
- encourage them to talk about good things that happen at school
- make reading with them part of your daily routine. Bedtime stories are a great way to end the day.

Some children wet their pants at school, which can embarrass them. Reassure them that it often happens and is nothing to worry about. Encourage them to tell the teacher. Pack spare clothing in their bag.

If your child is stressed

Children can show stress by:

- being tearful
- not wanting to go to school
- having tummy aches or headaches.

You could help by:

- encouraging them to talk about what's worrying them
- letting them know that you are confident they can manage
- asking what they think would help them.

You can get further advice and support from:

- School
- School Nurse
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/collections/starting-primary-school/1>
- <https://www.gov.uk/schools-admissions/school-starting-age>
- <https://parentingsmart.place2be.org.uk/article/helping-your-child-when-they-start-or-change-primary-school>
- <https://parentingsmart.place2be.org.uk/article/secondary-school-transition>