



Getting Ready for the Transition to School

Here are some helpful tips in getting kids ready to start school.

1. Read stories about children going to school for the first time. Talk to your child about what's going on in the story, how the characters are feeling, the new adventures they have at school, and how the children always get to see their mommy or daddy at the end of the school day.
2. Use pretend play. Going to school might be the first time your child has ever been separated from you. Practice common routines through pretend play at home (like saying good-bye, taking off your coat, singing songs, reading stories, and most importantly, being able to see you again at the end of the school day). Always remind your child that “mommy/daddy/caregiver will always come back,” and repeat that phrase each time you leave.
3. Have play dates with future classmates. If possible, ask the school for a list of the students in your child's class and their parents' contact information before school begins. Arrange a play date with some of the children before school begins so that your child can become comfortable with their soon to be classmates.
4. Work on your own feelings of nervousness or stress. Your child will sense any nerves or fears on your part. He or she will be looking to you for ideas about how to feel and you should be prepared to show her your child you are confident that going to school will be great and that they will enjoy themselves.
5. Visit your child's school together. If the school allows, play on the playground, visit a classroom and try and meet the teacher. Otherwise, walk by the school with your child and get him or her used to the building, the trip there, and the new routine.
6. Don't talk or discuss school TOO much! Sometimes too much attention can cause worry instead of excitement.
7. Ask your child how he or she is feeling about beginning school. If your child seems worried, offer comfort but move on. Focus on the positives, like the new friends they will meet, the exciting toys they will be able to play with, and the awesome playground!
8. Look for nonverbal messages. Your child may not be able to tell you they are nervous about school, but they may “act out” fears by clinging, becoming withdrawn, or by being more aggressive. Children may also backslide in other areas (for example, wetting pants even though they are potty trained). This is normal, and will pass.

9. Get your child excited about school. Choose a backpack or lunchbox (if needed) together. Pick out a special, first-day-of-school outfit. Let your child choose a special breakfast on the first day and take pictures!
10. Let your child know what the school day will be like. Tell them that you will be in the classroom in the beginning but that you will eventually leave so your child can be with their new friends and the teacher. Reassure your child that you or someone he or she knows will always be waiting when school is finished. Remember to practice what that will be like at home before school starts.
11. Allow your child to bring something special to school. If the school says it's okay, let your child bring a comfort item from home (even a picture of your family) that he or she can keep in her cubby, and have it close throughout the day for a little extra comfort.
12. Make your goodbye short and happy (even if you're feeling nervous or sad yourself). Say a quick, happy good-bye and tell your child that school will be great. It's always helpful to have a good-bye routine that is between you and your child. Read the book *The Kissing Hand* together, and develop a routine of your own.
13. Bottom line, keep the focus on the positives. Talk about the fun, all the new friends, and the toys to play with. Don't mention how much you'll miss your child, or how hard it will be to say goodbye (don't let your face give it away). Remember, children are looking to you to let them know that school will be a positive experience.