

The Excitement and Challenge of Beginning School

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When children enter school for the first time, it can be a time of great excitement and new challenges as well as trepidation. Children may undergo physical, emotional and social challenges. For some children, entering school is the first time of a prolonged separation from parents and trusted caregivers. This change in routine may be daunting at first. Additionally, school may be the first time the child is required to sit quietly at a table and pay attention to directions. For some children, there is a significant social adjustment as activities, supplies and the attention of adults must be shared.

Parents can be instrumental in helping their children adapt to school. The following are some guidelines:

1. Prepare yourself emotionally for the change. When children go to school for the first time, it can be bittersweet for parents and children alike. Be aware of your individual thoughts and feelings about your child growing up and becoming more independent.
2. Have a plan to take care of yourself. If you are accustomed to spending the day with your child, those first few days of school may be lonely. Plan to do something that you enjoy.
3. Be positive when discussing school and the upcoming changes. Children often pick up on the attitudes of parents.
4. Before the new school year begins, discuss the changes that will happen in your child's daily routine with him. Be specific as to where he will go to school, how he will get there, how long the school day is and how he will get home.
5. Encourage your child to discuss her feelings about going to school. Listen attentively and try to ease her fears.
6. Read books about other children starting school. It may be helpful for him to see how other children feel uncertain at times and how they overcome their fears.
7. Before school begins visit the school often. Take a tour of the school and find her classroom, the restroom and other rooms where she will be spending time.
8. If your child tends to be shy and particularly reluctant to go to school, play at the school playground with him and just have fun. While at the playground, do not mention school.

9. The week leading up to school, make sure your child gets plenty of rest. When we are tired, situations often seem worse than they really are.
10. Plan to be a few minutes early the first day. When we are rushed, it is easy to become stressed.
11. Always say goodbye, and reassure your child that you will see her at the end of the day. Let her know that you will be interested in hearing about her day when she gets home.

Even with the most thorough preparation, there may be bumps in the road and there may be challenges unique to your child. When you approach the challenges with confidence and an attitude of “we will get through this together” children will feel confident as well. You and your child can get through it together.

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