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Transition to Primary School



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Transitions: Starting Primary School

Becoming a school kid is a big, big milestone. It is an exciting time for a family and also a significant transition for all of you. Enjoy the thrills, spills and chill and seek support or guidance if needed. Below are some tips on how to handle this transition.

Model a positive attitude

Be mindful of how you speak about school and what it will be like. Try to balance the exciting and fun parts with the reality that there will be ups and downs.

Avoid pressure

Remind your children repeatedly that Prep or the first year at school is mostly about learning to be a school kid, so it's not a big deal how many letters and numbers they know right now.

Be social

Talk with them about making friends. Doing roleplays or having casual chats about how friendships form and some of the social behaviours needed now that they are at school. Give them a chance to practice by having play-time with peers before school starts. Remember, for many kids this will be the first time they're making friends without parental supervision. The skills you teach them here will be useful for the rest of their lives.

Set your own goals

Acknowledge that your routines and your parenting role will also change. Ensure you have enough time and resources to meet your needs and keep you feeling happy at home or work now your child has started at school. It is a transition time for parents too!



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Go back to school

Many schools have a lot of activities and opportunities for parents to participate and connect with both the school and other parents: orientation evenings, school working groups, parenting programs, sports days. Show your children that school is a positive place and you could make some community connections too!



Teachers are allies

Teaching, like parenting can be a tough job, except multiplied! Be helpful and understanding about their workloads. If you have issues or requests, respectful and patient communication is best for giving them insight into what works well with your child. Remember that they are trained professionals, and that sometimes, as a parent, you can be biased towards your child. This is a good thing! Everybody deserves a parent in their corner. But remember that your child can behave differently at school than at home, and that even good children can sometimes do bad things. Avoid being too critical if possible, but also don't be afraid to speak out if you have real concerns.

Get organised

It is helpful to model positive routines and organisation for your children and all family members, particularly in the first few months when you all might be a bit more tired than usual. Have early dinners, keep to bedtime routines on school nights and limit technology. Draw up signs, diagrams or lists together and set out clothes, books, sports gear or whatever they need the night before. This will really save both of you in the morning! They can own this responsibility of getting themselves ready as they get older.

What to do if they come home upset

Our own memories and experiences of school can be powerful and may stay with us for a long time. As adults we can all remember what it felt like to be left out of a game, sit alone at lunchtime or not be picked for a team. We can all connect with these feelings, so it can be hard for parents to see their children being upset or left out.

Talk about it

Silence is not always golden in these situations. It is important to ask about and validate the child's feelings: "That sounds pretty tough." Find out more, but keep in mind that some kids may exaggerate. Acknowledge what they say but help them maintain perspective. Avoid statements that minimise their experience, like: "You'll laugh about it when you're older." It's usually true, but as children have fewer experiences, more minor things can be a big deal. Don't overindulge them – it's important for children to build resilience – but remember how much those little things might have affected you, or might still affect you.

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Encourage them

Collaborative problem solving is a great way to build up both of your skills and resilience so it is not as hard in the future. Your children will then take these practical life skills that are useful for tackling problems into their adult lives.

Be positive and constructive

Children will look to you for emotional and practical support. Do this with positive praise and encouragement: "Sounds like you handled it really well." Ask if they can see a way forward, "What do you think you could do?" and then offer suggestions (if necessary), "What do you think of this idea..." and then make a plan together, "OK so tell me the plan..."

Next steps

Once you have discussed and worked through a positive plan together you can then move on or shift their focus on to something else. "Now let's build something awesome with Lego.".

Follow-up

Make sure you check in with them the next day: "So, I was thinking of you today, how did you go?"





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What you can do when they don't want to go to school

School refusal is hard all-round. It is understandable when children like being at home and spending time with you, but over the long-term it will have impacts on a whole range of important skills and outcomes for them educationally, socially and emotionally. So what can you do?

Don't overreact

Be interested in why. It might seem like the child is being defiant, or that they would rather play video games than study, but it's important to find out why. Often, children have a reason for not wanting to go for school, but without the tools to handle complex or negative emotions, they lash out. For example, the child may be experiencing bullying, or may feel very alone, so talk about the support available and the school friends waiting to see them. That being said, sometimes a child actually does just want to play video games instead of going to school. In this case, just think of all the times you've wanted to stay home instead of going to work, and treat it accordingly.

Be firm and keep them busy

"We need to go now", is a way of demonstrating the importance of school and keeping to routines. But being firm doesn't mean being cruel. You can be firm while speaking softly. Reinforcing and reminding your child of the routine can be helpful. i.e. "It might be difficult in the morning to get up and get ready for school, what can we put in place together to make that easier for us all?". The old distraction trick can be useful, for example, "Help me decide what's for dinner before we leave", put on music or sing to them or make them laugh as you get ready at home or while driving to school. Try not to focus on it in the morning. It is better to have these discussions after school.

Be careful with how you offer support. Saying things like "Oh, you poor thing" without planning towards resolution can be unhelpful as it can further entrench their anxiety and work against building and developing their autonomy and self-determination. Instead, reflect the language you hear them saying and validate their feelings and encourage them to work with you to discuss what else could be supportive in attending school

Ongoing school refusal is really difficult for some parents to manage, so it's okay to seek advice and guidance and speak to the teacher or wellbeing officer, or seek support from a counsellor or parent educator if it's ongoing.

Where to access further help

QFamily qfamily.org.au
Family Relationships Advice Line 1800 050 321
Lifeline 13 11 14
Raising Children
www.raisingchildren.net.au
Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 or
www.kidshelp.com.au



Drummond Street Services acknowledges the traditional owners of the land where we work and pay respects to elders past, present and future.