

STARTING KINDERGARTEN OR SCHOOL? 12 TIPS TO PREPARE THEM TO SOAR...



Starting school or kindy? 12 tips to set your child up for success...

Starting kindergarten and school is both an exciting and nerve wracking time for little ones and parents alike. Here are a handful of ways you can help your child make the most of this new experience, coming out more skilled, confident and resilient...

1. Let them have their feelings.

Most children experience mixed feelings about starting kindergarten and school. When their feelings are acknowledged they can get the most out of this new phase in their life. If they are nervous, acknowledge it and hear them out. Understanding comments like, 'of course you feel that way,' and 'other children get that feeling too,' helps them relax, normalise and accept the feelings so they can move on to problem solving and social emotional growth.

2. Start a goodbye ritual before starting kindergarten / school you can use once they start to keep farewells consistent and familiar.

The ritual might be a special hug, handshake or saying that signals, 'bye for now!' Predictability reduces anxiety.

3. Be prepared for separation anxiety.

Sometimes it's there from the start, at other times it surprises you down the track when it hits your little one that kindy/ school isn't a short term novelty. It's very normal for young children to struggle departing from people they love. You're their secure base, the person who makes everything better, and the one who's been there through thick and thin right from the start.

When they are sad about separating, acknowledge this tough and even frightening feeling. Name their feelings and empathise with comments like, 'you're sad, you want me to stay. I understand.' The more you respond in an empathetic way, the sooner they'll move through this feeling. Try not to rush it or show your own anxiety.

Next, draw your child's attention to the next point of connection. Just like we often say, 'let's catch up soon' to friends we are saying goodbye to, children are comforted by knowing they'll see you again soon too. Comments like, 'I can't wait to hear all about your day when we go bike riding tonight' and 'I'll be waiting by the rock ready to play eye spy,' help them see ahead to the next time they see you which can be very calming. Then make that goodbye short, sharp and shiny. Be confident in leaving.

4. Encourage independence at kindy / school drop off.

Let them carry their bags and unpack their belongings. If they don't know what to do ask questions like, 'where could we find out the answer?' Or help them ask a teacher/ another student for help. These self-help skills are vital for developing independence and feeling connected as active participants in their kindy/ school. If you do too much for them, they can feel helpless and dependent which affects how well they participate in their new environment.

5. Try and be punctual.

This is never easy, no matter how prepared you are. Children are unpredictable and any small thing can set you back. Be willing to wake up earlier than your children and to wake them up early too. If you're always fifteen minutes late then you might need to wake up fifteen minutes earlier.

Focusing on punctuality is an important life skill and manner. It tells the teacher and the class, 'you're important and so is your time.' Keeping people waiting says, 'other things mattered more.' While everyone gets late sometimes, when it happens every day it's unlikely to be embraced.

Help your child understand why punctuality is important and ask them if they have any ideas about how to get to kindy/ school on time. Try ideas out until you get closer to your goal while helping them build self-awareness about what distracts and slows them down.

6. Make a visual schedule/ checklist of what to do to be ready for school.

You can laminate picture cards for all the necessary steps (brush teeth, uniform on, readers in bag, shoes, pack lunch, breakfast, and hair and so on). You can place each step on a Velcro dot and when each step is completed they can pull it off and 'post' in an envelope below. The beauty of these schedules is they not only build independence but the schedule becomes the 'boss' rather than you. When your child is floating around aimlessly you can ask, 'what's next on your checklist' rather than dishing out another instruction they probably won't listen to! You can also make these with a whiteboard where they tick everything off.

7. If they are upset after school about a friend/ teacher, listen but don't jump in too quick.

When children are young they tend to globalise and magnify negative events. They might say, 'everyone at my school is mean' or, 'I have the worst teacher in the world.' While it's important to hear them out and acknowledge their feelings, try not to get involved or add your own commentary which can make things much worse in the long run. If they keep repeating a problem or are anxious about going to school, make a time to talk to their teacher to see if you can find out more.

8. Allow natural consequences.

Try to support them through rather than fix their challenges. Don't jump in to drop a forgotten hat so they don't miss out on lunch play. If they forget their hat, they need to experience the consequences which usually means play in the shade. If you rescue them from challenges like this, they can develop a sense of entitlement that isn't reasonable and can miss opportunities to build coping skills when things don't go as planned.

If they don't do their homework don't make excuses for them. Help them let their teacher know they didn't do it so they own the responsibility around their actions. This doesn't need to be done harshly as feeling too tired to read after starting school is common for most. It's just about helping them take ownership over their actions.

9. Offer a transitional object in their bag if they find separation hard.

A piece of your jewellery/ clothing/ a photo/ a special crystal 'full of Mummy and Daddy's love' are all examples of an object connecting you to them when separating.

10. Talk about school routines and rules ahead of time so there are fewer surprises.

For example some children don't know you need permission to go to the toilet during class...or that teachers get unhappy if you talk / muck around during learning time. Guide them to respect their teacher and their rules which are usually designed to keep everyone safe and free to learn.

11. If you're not happy with the teacher/school don't openly discuss this with your child.

Your lost confidence in anyone or the school will almost certainly mean their lost confidence, and potentially the start of stress and anxiety around schooling. Also remember to give it time. Starting kindy and school means getting to know lots of new adults. Few of them will bring the same sense of comfort and joy as a parent or other familiar adults. Most children take some time to adjust to and accept their new teachers. Help them through by reminding them they don't need to like their teacher immediately and that teachers are there to help and support them.

12. Consider a family calendar so everyone knows what's happening each day.

Library days, sports practice, special events, who will do pick up / drop off can all be recorded here to keep everything predictable and organised.

Finally, as always, follow your own intuition about what your child needs to feel confident and prepared. These tips aren't written to be prescriptive, they offer a framework to build your own approach from.

Wishing you all the very best for the first day back at school whether your oldies or newbies!

Thank you for reading.

Xx  Madhavi Nawana Parker

Books to help your family and school crush 2022 here 

<https://positivemindsaustralia.com.au/books/>

Free resources here  <https://positivemindsaustralia.com.au/free-resources/>