Preparing your child for back to school

Whether your child is starting school for the first time or returning after a summer break, the start of the school year brings a great deal of excitement, together with some anxiety and stress.



A little planning and preparation can ease much of the uncertainty and help to make the first day an enjoyable experience for everyone.

Starting school for the first time

You may have conflicting emotions about your child starting school. While it's a proud moment and a real milestone in your child's development, you may be anxious about how he or she may cope, and perhaps subconsciously afraid that this means you are losing your baby.

Accept that these feelings are natural and realize that your child's feelings are probably very similar to your own. Your child is undoubtedly excited and proud about starting school, but is likely also nervous and unsure.

Here are some tips to prepare your child for his or her first day:

- **Talk about your child's feelings and acknowledge those feelings.** Reassure your child by focusing on their strengths that will help them to feel more positive about going off to school.
- **Explain that there will always be someone around to help** if the child is unsure where to go or what to do. Tell your child that it isn't babyish to ask for help—it's the smart thing to do.
- **Take your child to visit the school and, if possible, the new teacher and classroom**. Show your child where to hang his or her jacket. Visit the washroom. Check out where they eat lunch. Walk through the schoolyard and talk about recess.
- **If possible, introduce your child to one or more of the other children who will be starting at the school.** Invite them over to play, and get to know their parents.
- **Walk your child to school for at least the first few days or weeks, until your child feels secure.** Don't hang around if your child begins to cry. Children usually settle down fast once their parents are out of sight. If it's possible and the school is willing, you could consider spending some time in the class for the first day.
- **Ensure your child always walks home with a buddy** if you or a caregiver is not available.

Preparing to return to school

Even children who have been at school for years, may feel a little anxious about the return to a new classroom and a new teacher. Encourage them to talk about their feelings, and reassure them that they will do just fine.

- **Begin easing into the school routine at least a week before school starts.** Your child may have been going to sleep later and waking later. Gradually ease back into school bedtimes and breakfast times.
- **Treat the return to school as a positive and exciting experience.** Help your child to organize the bedroom to make it easy to find school clothes or do homework.
- **Make a special day out of buying school supplies and clothes.** Have lunch out in the middle of your day and use the time to talk about school fears and ambitions.
- **Encourage your child to begin study time again**, prior to the return to school, and regular homework. Your child might want you to help review things previously learned or work ahead in an unfinished workbook. Alternatively, encourage general quiet reading or writing.
- **Walk the route to school with younger children before the first day back.** If possible, visit the new classroom and new teacher.
- **Review street-proofing tips with your child before school starts.** If your child is going to walk to and from school without a caregiver, remind him or her to always walk with a buddy.

First day back

Getting into the school-year routine can be a difficult adjustment at first—for both parents and kids. Here are some tips to help you prepare for the big day and get back into the routine:

- **Lay your child's clothes out the night before.** This is a good routine to get into and can save stress during the early morning rush.
- **Let your child choose what goes in the lunch box** (assuming that the choices cover the basic food groups).
- **If your child is young enough to enjoy it, write a note and put it in the lunch box.** It can be a comforting reminder of home when lunchtime comes.
- **Make sure your child has a good breakfast.**
- **When your child returns home, he or she may need a little quiet time to unwind before they answer questions about their big day.** Let them know that you can't wait to hear about their day but that you understand if they would like to enjoy a snack first.
- **Help your child adjust to the homework routine.** Set aside a quiet and comfortable place for your child to work, and make sure he or she has all the required supplies.

Remember that the first few days can be extra stressful as your child settles into new routines in school. It may take a while before everyone can really relax. However, with open communication between parent and child, and a little pre-planning, you can ease the transition back to school and prepare your child for his or her big day.