

New experiences Starting school



Everything parents need to know about preparing their children for starting school and settling in, with helpful tips and advice. By **Annette Rawstrone**



Starting school is a major milestone towards your child's independence and can be daunting for both you and them. However, the transition will be much easier if you start to prepare your child in the months leading up to the start of term, even if they have been happily attending nursery.

HOW TO PREPARE

You may think that preparing your child for school involves getting them to learn their letters, numbers or colours. While you can discuss these



with them, it's actually much better to focus on practical skills that can support them in the busy school environment and help your child to become independent:

Sleep Establishing a good bedtime routine will enable your child to get plenty of sleep and cope with the rigours of the school day.

Toileting Help your child to go to the toilet independently, wipe themselves, flush and wash their hands.

Getting dressed Being

able to dress and undress themselves will help your child to engage fully in the school day – for instance, changing into wellies for water play, putting on painting aprons, fastening their coat and getting ready for PE.

Eating Show your child how to use a knife and fork and, if needed, carry a tray. If they will be having a packed lunch, show them how to peel fruit, open tubs, drinks containers and yoghurt cartons.

Communication Encouraging your child to speak to adults – such as

neighbours, shop assistants or bus drivers – will help build their confidence to approach school staff for assistance and to answer questions or generally converse.

Becoming familiar with school

Attending settling-in sessions at the school is very important, because they enable your child to become familiar with the environment and so can reduce your child's anxiety. It can also help you to become comfortable with the school and get to know the staff, which can lessen any anxiety that you may be feeling. Try to step back gently from your child during the settling-in sessions so that other adults and children can interact with them.

Other ways to enable your child to become more familiar with the school include:

- pointing out the building when you're passing
- allowing your child to try on their school uniform
- chatting about any friends who will also be attending
- discussing what they will do at school, focusing on the activities your child particularly enjoys
- practising the journey to school.

HOW YOUR CHILD MAY REACT

The way your child reacts to starting school can be affected by their temperament. Children who are naturally more extrovert and curious often find it easier to cope with the new



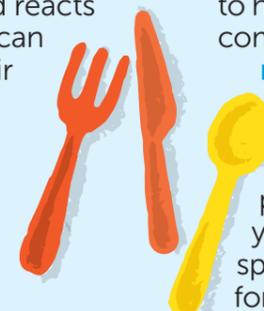
people and place and settle in, while those who are shyer and less adventurous may take longer to adapt.

Many schools have a gradual settling period, with children attending for half a day or a few hours at first and then slowly increasing to a full day. Don't worry if your child is upset when you leave. They are likely to calm down quickly when you're not there, and staff will call you if they are distressed.

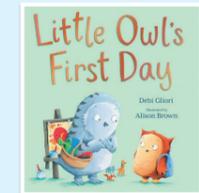
You may find that even though your child is happy at school, they play up more for you in the afternoons or regress in their behaviour. This could be due to tiredness or the sheer effort of complying all day and then relaxing at home with familiar people.

AFTER STARTING SCHOOL

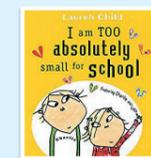
- Aim to be really organised in the morning so that your child has a good start to the day and their stress levels are low when they arrive at school.
- Try not to become frustrated if your child seems to take longer to settle in to school than their classmates. This may only upset them further and result in them taking longer to adapt.
- Your child's anxiety is likely to increase if you are also anxious. Consider why you are anxious and speak to the school about your concerns to help you to feel more comfortable.



It can take a few weeks for some children to settle in to school. If your child seems particularly distressed or you are worried, then speak to the school and ask for additional support. ■



Little Owl's First Day
by Debi Gliori
It's a big day for Little Owl – his first day at school – but he'd rather stay at home and have fun with Mummy and Baby Owl.



I Am Absolutely Too Small for School
by Lauren Child
Lola is 'too extremely busy doing important things at home' instead of going to school.



Starting School
by Janet and Allan Ahlberg
A reassuring read from first-day nerves to finding your peg.



Harry and The Dinosaurs Go To School
by Ian Whybrow
Harry and his dinosaurs are excited, and a bit nervous, to be starting school, but they learn how enjoyable it is.



The Kissing Hand
by Audrey Penn
A simple story to help children to deal with separation anxiety.



Come to School Too, Blue Kangaroo!
by Emma Chichester Clark
Lily and her soft toy start at a new school with fun results.