

## Helping Young Children Start School

A new school year can make young children nervous, especially if they are entering a new environment. Whether they are starting preschool, kindergarten or first grade, some children may be worried about the new setting and the new experience, and there are things that parents and families can do to help their children make a successful transition.

First, discuss the changes that will be taking place. Before the new school year begins, talk with your child about the changes in his daily routine. Together, you could make a chart illustrated with photographs or pictures of the new morning schedule. Encourage him to describe how he feels about starting a new program or school and try to ease his fears. He may be nervous about new challenges and social interactions at school. Reading and discussing books is a great way to make him comfortable with a new experience. It helps him see how other children beginning school have similar feelings of uncertainty and how they overcome them.

In the days and weeks before school starts, help your child ease into the new environment and adjust to the new routine. Arrange to visit the school and classroom with your child, and, if possible, meet her teacher. This will help her become comfortable in her new environment while you are with her. Have her start her school-year bed time and morning routine a few days early. This may prevent her from being confused, groggy, or cranky on the first day of school. Arrange a playdate with another child from her class, preferably one-on-one, so that she knows someone in her class and will be more comfortable.

As school gets closer, your child can help get ready for the first day. Let him lay out his clothes or pack a back pack for the first day. If possible, arrive at the new school early on the first few days to give him time to settle in. Use this time walking or riding to school together, or waiting at the bus stop, to talk about what he can expect that day. Always say good-bye, and let him know that you will see him at the end of the day. Your child will have an easier time with separation if he's confident you will return to pick him up.

Problems may arise during the first few days of school, even with appropriate preparation, so be ready to handle them in a matter-of-fact way. Approach the new year with confidence, and your child will, too. Take time to make sure your child adapts to his new environment, clearly explain the changes around him, and listen if he has doubts or fears.