

FACTS *for* FAMILIES

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Starting School

Starting school is a major milestone for children and parents. School is a place away from home where a child will have some of his greatest challenges, successes, failures, and embarrassments. Because school is beyond the control of parents, it can be stressful for both the child and the parents.

At school, a child will learn about how the world works, about appropriate social interactions, and about people outside his family. He will learn about himself, his strengths, weaknesses, interests, and who he is socially. He will have to perform in a way that he never has had to at home. He has to separate from parents, cope with social and academic challenges, and make friends.

Starting school can be both fun and stressful. Many children show some anxiety about school. Anxiety can occur at the beginning of a new school year or when a child changes schools. A child who has been in day care may be more comfortable with the daily ritual of separation. These children may be less anxious for the first few days of nursery school, preschool, or kindergarten.

If parents have mixed feelings (e.g. guilt, fear, or anxiety) about sending a child to school, it can add to the child's hesitancy, or reluctance. A child's experience starting school is influenced by his preparation and his parents' feelings and attitude.

What Parents Can Do To Help Their Child:

- Show interest and be supportive and encouraging.
- Talk to your child about what to expect, such as the activities (nap, snacks, and story-time), the schedule, the toys, and the other children.
- Take your child to school to get used to the layout (where his classroom is, where the bathrooms are, which cubbyhole or coat hook is his, etc.) and to introduce him to the teacher.
- Let your child know it's normal to feel nervous or worried about being away from parents and suggest that he take a familiar object or a family picture to school.
- Getting on the bus with a favorite playmate or carpooling with a friend can ease the daily transition from home to school. Identifying a buddy at school can also help decrease apprehension about being alone in the new setting.
- Make the getting-ready-for-school ritual as stress-free as possible. For example, lay out all his notebooks and clothes the night before. Having the child help with school preparations (example, make his lunch) the night before can also reduce stress for everyone.

What To Do If Your Child Has Difficulties:

- If your child has significant difficulty with separation, consider staying for a portion of the first day or two. Discuss this plan with the teacher. As he becomes more comfortable, make your stay shorter, until eventually, you stay only long enough to help him off with his coat, greet the teacher, and say goodbye.

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