

# Preparing Children for School

*School days, school days,  
Dear old golden rule days . . .*

—Will D. Cobb



When your children are about to start formal schooling, you may worry: “Are they ready?” or “Have I done enough?”

Actually, you may have taught your children more than you realize. You’ve helped them learn basic survival skills. You’ve taught them to feed themselves, cross a street, and get along with others. And, by teaching them language, you have given them the foundation for all later learning.

You have also given your children attitudes toward school and education. Those attitudes are far more important than numbers and letters. Attitudes determine how children feel about school and how hard they try. Making sure children form positive attitudes is one of your most important tasks.

## Getting butterflies

Most young children are eager to go to school. They talk and talk about it. They want to learn how to read. And they are anxious to please and do well. In fact, most children feel so excited they begin to get “butterflies” inside. They may be:

- Worried about their parents. *Will Daddy leave me there and never come back?*
- Nervous about being with strangers. *Who will play with me?*
- Scared about going to a new place. *How will I find kindergarten? What if I get lost?*
- Afraid they won’t learn. *But I can’t read yet!*



Parents, too, feel excited. They’ve looked forward to this time as well. They’re glad their child is growing up and becoming independent. Yet, parents may be apprehensive. They may be:

- Upset about leaving their child. *Will Tammy miss me? Will she cry?*
- Nervous about their child’s health and safety. *Will she be worn out from riding the bus so long?*
- Anxious for their child to succeed. *Did I do enough to prepare him?*
- Unsure of their new responsibilities. *What will Billy’s school expect of me?*

Even if a child has been in school settings before—play groups, nursery school, or day care—the start of formal schooling is a new experience for both children and parents. In their minds, this is the day the child begins “real” school. And, like any big change, it brings apprehension as well as joy.

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# HELPING • CHILDREN • GROW

## Having confidence



One thing that helps is having preparation. At the start of formal schooling a child needs to learn new skills—waiting in turn and being tested, for example. Preparing a child for these experiences gives both parent and child confidence and direction.

To make the change easier for you and your child, you can do some homework:

- Visit the classroom where your child will be.
- Find out what the school expects of you.
- Become involved in your child's school.

Learning about your child's school program and your new role as a school parent may help you in two ways. It may ease your worries and fears. It also may help you do a better job preparing your child.

Of course, your job will not be over the day your child enters school. Children continue to need preparation each year they join a new classroom or school. They need to know what school will be like. They need your enthusiasm and interest in education. And they always need your confidence in their ability to learn.

## A lesson plan for parents



As a parent, you've been helping your child develop the skills and attitudes needed in school. However, right before your child starts school he or she needs some special preparation. Here are a few things you can do to help your child adjust to school more easily.

### Take your child to visit school.

- Walk or ride the route to school.
- Wander down the halls.
- Look around the classroom and point out different things.
- Watch what children are doing.
- Find the bathroom.
- Look for the nurse's office.
- Play on the playground.
- Draw a map of the route to school.

- Draw a picture of the school.
- Take a photo of your child at school.
- Talk about what you saw.

### Talk about what your child will do in school.

- Find out what your child expects.
- Clear up misconceptions such as "But I can't read yet."
- Describe activities your child will do in school.
- Discuss why they are important.
- Explain some rules your child will have to follow in school and why they are necessary.
- Talk about the purpose of tests and grades.

### Introduce your child to people at school.

- Introduce your child to the teacher and principal.
- Tell your child something about the teacher—where he or she lives and whether he or she has children.
- Explain who other people are—custodians, secretaries, and assistant teachers.
- Invite a few of your child's future classmates home to play and get acquainted.

### Help your child feel he or she will like school and learning.

- Find out why your child thinks school is important.
- Explain why you think school is important.
- Share some of your good experiences in school.
- Show your child how skills learned in school may be used in later life.
- Explain how the teacher will help him or her learn.
- Start a school scrapbook to record important events and progress.

And, of course, continue to help your child grow in all areas of development: social, physical, mental, and emotional.

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