#READYFORSCHOOL

pacey
professional association for childcare and early years

PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR STARTING SCHOOL



START SCHOOL WITH A SMILE

Starting school is an exciting time for young children and their parents. It can be a daunting time, too. But with a little preparation and encouragement, most children will settle in easily at school.

PACEY childcare professionals have a great deal of experience in helping children to cope with times of transition. Here are some top tips, put together by some of our most experienced members, to help you prepare your child for starting school.

We hope they help you both start school with a smile!

DON'T WORRY

Your child doesn't need to be able to read, write or do sums before they start school. Children start school with a wide range of abilities and their teacher will be skilled at helping children progress at their own level.

What's most important is that you and your child have fun together in those preschool months and years – sharing stories, singing songs, playing games and talking about anything and everything.

PACEY has produced four factsheets, packed with easy and enjoyable activity ideas to give your child a gentle introduction to the listening, communicating, mark-making and number work they'll do in reception. You'll find them at **www.pacey.org.uk/schoolready**



LISTENING GAMES

Play some fun listening and doing games to help with following instructions. 'Simon says' or 'Can you find?' games are great for this.

SOME THINGS TO TRY

- Chat with your child about starting school. What do they think it will be like? What are they most looking forward to? Is there anything they're unsure or worried about?
- Look at the school's brochure, prospectus or website together and talk about the pictures.
- Find photos of you and other family members at school, and chat about happy memories from your own school days.
- If possible, visit the school with your child before they start – either on formal open days, or fêtes, plays and other events.
- Read books together about starting school (see the next page).
- If your child seems anxious about school, try focusing on the things they'll like best – maybe the sandpit, playhouse or new friends. Perhaps they have some friends from preschool who will be starting reception at the same time.
- Practise the school morning routine, including getting dressed and eating breakfast in time to leave.
- Practise the school run so that you're both prepared for the school morning journey.



THESE PICTURE BOOKS ABOUT GOING TO SCHOOL MAY BE HELPFUL:

- I am too Absolutely Small for School (Charlie and Lola) by Lauren Child
- Starting School by Janet and Allen Ahlberg
- Topsy and Tim Start School by Jean and Gareth Adamson
- Harry and the Dinosaurs Go to School by Ian Whybrow and Adrian Reynolds
- Come to School too, Blue Kangaroo! by Emma Chichester Clark
- Going to School Sticker Book and Starting School Sticker Book – Usborne

MORE THINGS TO TRY

- If your child has a particular worry – perhaps about wetting themselves, not liking the food, or feeling ill – talk about these concerns with your child and with the class teacher. Provide reassurance by discussing what to do and who to tell in these situations.
- If your child has a favourite security toy or blanket, try to get them used to being without it during the day. Talk to the class teacher to find out if your child is allowed to bring their toy or blanket and leave it in a tray or on their peg.
- If you have arranged childcare before or after school, talk this through with your child. If the childcare arrangement is new, try a settling-in period for this before the school term starts. Try putting together a wallchart of the week to help your child know what to expect.
- Have fun completing PACEY's 'getting dressed for school' activity together – it will help your child anticipate the daily routine ahead!

... AND SOME THINGS TO AVOID

- It's natural to feel nervous about your child starting school, but remember that your child can easily pick up on your emotions. Try to be relaxed and positive, rather than showing your own nerves.
- Try not to make comments such as "I hated school" or "I was rubbish at school", which might give your child a negative attitude.
- Try not to bombard your child with endless talk about school – treating it in a matter-of-fact way rather than focusing on the "big step ahead" will help soothe an anxious child.
- Don't over-hype school, as your little one may feel let down or mistrustful if it doesn't live up to expectations!

PUTTING TOGETHER A WALLCHART OF THE WEEK CAN HELP YOUR CHILD KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT

BEING PREPARED

If your child has already spent time in a childcare or preschool setting, they're probably already well on the way to having the social and practical skills they need to succeed at school. They're used to spending time apart from you, mixing with other children, taking instructions from and communicating with other adults, taking some responsibility for tidying up after themselves and looking after their own belongings.

Don't worry if your child hasn't attended a childcare setting or preschool. Playing with other children, whether friends and family members, or other children at the park or soft play area, is all good practice for forming friendships with classmates at school. Often children who don't know one another will make friends very easily, but if your child struggles, teach them some useful phrases such as "can I join in?" or "do you want to share?".

If you already know some other children who will be in your child's class, why not organise a play date or outing together? As well as being beneficial for the youngsters, it's helpful for you to be able to chat about your own feelings and anxieties with their parents, who may be feeling the same.

As the start of term approaches, try to get into the school routine, so your child gets used to getting up, going to bed, and having meals and snacks at the times they will on school days. Bath time and stories instead of TV and tablet games all help children to wind down before bedtime. Making time in the evening to chat about your day for 10 minutes can be a lovely routine for sharing fun times and any worries. Nutritious meals and plenty of sleep will help them to concentrate, learn and thrive at school.

If your child has naps, it would be wise to try phasing this out. This should be more manageable for them if they have a good bedtime routine. Maybe offer a down time after lunch rather than a nap. Some reception classes do provide a space for little ones to nap if needed, but if you can introduce the longer day before the school term starts, it should help with transition.



CAN DO ATTITUDE

Help to develop your child's independence and a 'can do' attitude by giving them a few everyday responsibilities as they get closer to school age. Perhaps they could lay the table, feed a pet or put their own laundry away.

TEACH THEM SOME USEFUL PHRASES SUCH AS "CAN I JOIN IN?" OR "DO YOU WANT TO SHARE?"

SELF-CARE

It will make life easier for your child (and school staff!) if your child can master these self-care skills before they start school:

GOING TO THE TOILET

Support your child to be confident about getting to the loo in time and wiping properly, using toilet paper rather than moist wipes. Do you have a different phrase for going to the toilet at home? Letting the class teacher know what this is will ensure they understand what your child is trying to ask.

WASHING THEIR HANDS

Chat about the importance of good handwashing with soap and water, especially after going to the toilet or handling animals. A good way of showing how germs can linger is to let your child cover their hands in paint (pretend germs!) and then try to wash it all off.

DRESSING AND UNDRESSING

Let your child practise putting on their school clothes, taking them off and folding them neatly in preparation for PE lessons, especially if there are fiddly fastenings such as shirt buttons and zips. Clothes with elastic bands and shoes with Velcro® are easier to handle for young children. Teach your child tricks such as putting labels at the back, holding cuffs to stop sleeves riding up, and wrinkling tights to put toes in first.

FEEDING THEMSELVES

From September 2014, free school meals will be available to all children from reception to year 2, but many schools will offer the option of packed lunches, too. Children having school dinners need to be able to use a full-sized knife and fork and carry a plate or tray. If your child is taking a lunchbox, make sure they can open it as well as any containers and packets inside.

USING A TISSUE

Introduce your child to the routine of 'catch it, bin it, kill it' – catching their sneeze or runny nose in a tissue, putting it in the bin straightaway, then washing hands to kill germs. Some children find nose-blowing difficult, so play games to practise nose control – blowing a feather into the air, for example.

TIDYING UP

Get your child into the habit of hanging their coat up, putting their toys away, clearing the table, and so on, to prepare them for doing these things at school. Why not turn it into a game? Many schools use a piece of music to indicate tidy up time and motivate children to help. Try this at home and ask which song your child would like. 'Mission Impossible' is a popular one!



FLIP TRICK

Have you heard of the 'flip trick' for putting a coat on?

Put your child's coat upside down on a table in front of them.

They can then put their hands in the armholes and flip the coat over their head – a handy way for your child to put their coat on by themselves!

YOUR FIRST WEEK CHECKLIST

- Do you know exactly where you need to take your child, and at what time?
- Do you know where to collect your child, and at what time?
- Do you know what equipment they'll need for the first few days? (PE kit, book bag, spare clothes and so on)
- Do you and your child know where to hang coats and PE kits?
- Does your child know who'll be collecting them each day? If they are attending an after-school club, it could be a teacher, an assistant or a member of the after-school club. If it's your regular childminder, have you reworked your contract to include the school run details?
- Do you know if you take your child into the classroom and settle them, or are they expected to go in on their own?
- Have you put name labels on absolutely everything?! Show your child where the labels are and make sure they are sewn or stuck somewhere that's easy for them to find.



BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

It's quite common for children's behaviour at home to change when they first start school. Don't be surprised if your little one becomes more clingy, argumentative, lethargic, excitable or prone to tantrums for a while.

THE FIRST FEW WEEKS

Many children settle into school life easily, while others take longer. Don't worry if your child is tearful and clingy for the first few days – it's quite normal. Although you might feel terrible leaving them, they will most likely be playing quite happily within a few minutes.

If your child seems exhausted at the end of the day, let them have some quiet time or even a nap when they get home. If they're starving hungry, a healthy snack and drink can help restore energy levels.

Let your child get used to school life before introducing after-school activities. It's a good idea to keep the first few weekends quiet, too, as they will likely need time to recharge, just as we do when we start a new job or a big project.

Keep talking to your child about their feelings about school, and put aside some special time to chat about their day. Some children are enthusiastic at first, but once the reality of going to school day after day sets in, they can become reluctant. If this happens with your child, use a calendar to help them understand when weekends and holidays are coming up. You might want to arrange a few treats for them to look forward to as well.

KEEP TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT THEIR FEELINGS ABOUT SCHOOL

THE FIRST FEW WEEKS

Establish a friendly relationship with your child's class teacher, including finding out their preferred times and means of communication. They're experts at helping young children to settle in and thrive at school, and will be able to reassure you about most issues that come up. If you do have any concerns, raise them early to prevent them from developing into bigger problems.

Summer-born children in particular, who start school soon after turning four, may need extra sensitivity and flexibility to help them settle in. If there's anything you think might help your child to feel settled, suggest it to their class teacher. Remember, you know your own child best.

For further resources on helping prepare your child for school, as well as information about childcare, go to **www.pacey.org.uk**



WE WISH YOU AND YOUR CHILD HAPPY SCHOOL DAYS AHEAD!

PACEY IS THE PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR CHILDCARE AND EARLY YEARS.

We promote best practice and support childcare professionals to deliver high standards of care and learning.

We have around 35,000 members – childminders, nannies and nursery workers – working around England and Wales.

Every day they demonstrate their commitment to the highest standards of care and help children get the best start in life.

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