

STARTING YOUR CHILD IN SCHOOL

Here is some advice on making your child's transition to school routines smooth and comfortable, based upon our long experience.

Young children live much more in the present moment than we do. Concepts of future time can be confusing to them. Therefore, counting down the days until school starts can create anxiety if done too early.

Instead, begin now to indirectly prepare your child for school building the skills and schedules that will make the first day a smooth and easy shift rather than a sudden interruption of routines.

These skills include independence, concentration and ability to choose. When children are independent in doing and caring for themselves, not only do they feel proud and capable, but are filled with self-confidence and esteem.

To help build independence, we suggest that you give some thought to the things she could be doing herself if she had better access, or the right tools or had been given a careful "how to" demonstration. For example, perhaps she would be happy to brush her own teeth if she had a safe platform and could reach the sink. If she had a small pitcher, she could enjoy pouring her own milk. She would probably love to help set the table if someone took time to show her where to place the knife, fork and spoon.

To help your child develop his ability to concentrate. Provide a limited number of interesting, challenging and developmentally appropriate toys and materials as well as plenty of uninterrupted time to play with them. In general, toys and materials that elicit active participation rather than passive entertainment are much better for the development of focus and concentration.

The first time a toy or materials is introduced, provide a clear demonstration of its use including its clean-up for the best opportunity for success and engagement.

Arrange toys and activities on a shelf rather than a toy box if possible. This helps your child recognize that everything has its place. She will not only know where to return it when she is done but also where to find it for the next time she wants to use it.

More importantly, having her toys visible and accessible allows her to choose one activity that most appeals at this developmental moment. It is called spontaneous activity and is a healthy sign of development.

The ability to choose requires practice and can be developed throughout the day by presenting choices at every opportunity--"Would you like to wear your blue shorts today or your red ones?"

“Would you like to have carrots for dinner tonight or peas?” Keeping choices simple, limited and age appropriate prevents overwhelming the child and makes it easier for him to choose.

Begin acclimating your child to the new routine of preparing to go to school by beginning to teach the skills, one at a time, that will allow him to dress himself, help prepare and eat his breakfast, and get himself ready to go. Practice by going on small outings, such as taking a walk, until he is used to the routine of “getting up on and on the go!”

We also highly recommend that you begin to adjust his sleep schedule a few weeks BEFORE the start date. Decide what time she will need to wake up to allow an unhurried start to the day. Wake him up a little earlier each morning and put him to bed a little early each night until he begins to naturally wake up rested and refreshed at the desired time. A tired and grumpy child, awakened an hour earlier than usual, is not likely to have a successful first day.

If your child is naturally an early riser, ensure her bedtime is early enough to accommodate her natural schedule, so that she is rested throughout her morning at school.

This is also a good time to begin reducing screen time and viewing in general and eliminating any TV in the morning. You won't want school to seem like a punishment the first day when it is turned off.

When watching screens and TV the child is rewarded for mere passivity. She would not be in a more natural state of mind that she will need to be in to explore, experience and actively build her mind at school if she has just finished being passively entertained by television. The same goes for use of tablets and smartphones-begin reducing the overall use and eliminating in the morning.

If you wish to discuss school with your child, do it in a low key way. If your child asks about what this mysterious idea of school is and what school might be like, a simple answer will suffice. “It is a place made especially for children where they can go each day to make friends, do their work, play games and learn.” Let him know that someday she gets to go there while not being too specific about what she will do in school. That way if it doesn't happen, i.e, she doesn't get to paint (or other activity) on the first day, she would not feel disappointed in either you or the school.

When your child's first day of school finally arrives and he is all dressed and ready to go, you can announce that he will go to school, to see his teacher and meet other children. Following these simple suggestions can help make your child's beginning in school successful and stress-free for all.