

School Readiness

Going to 'big school' will be one of the most exciting moments in your child's life so far. So how do you know when your child is ready? How do you choose a good school? How can you help your child prepare for their first big day and beyond?

Below we have gathered a wealth of information to help get you started on the road to 'big school'.

What To Look For In A Good School

Choosing a school for your child is one of the biggest decisions you have to make as a parent. It can be daunting for parents these days to make the 'right' choice, surrounded by a myriad of educational philosophies and programs. To keep things simple, we have compiled a list of things to look out for in a good school. Keep in mind some of the following:

- Does the school freely answer your questions and make time for face-to-face meetings with parents?
- Do you get a good feeling entering the school? Do they teach children care of others and foster an environment based on community and equity.
- Is the school clean, well kept and presented nicely (always check the toilet blocks to begin to answer this question)?
- Does the school have an orientation program where your child can meet their teacher and classmates prior to commencing?
- Has the school made available written information about their Philosophy, Program and Activities?
- What are the school's Policies on Bullying, Gender Equity, Multiculturalism, Sickness, Class sizes, and Behaviour Management? Are parents able to participate in Policy development?
- Are the school grounds monitored well for intruders? Are the school grounds secure and safe for your child at play time? How many teachers are on playground duty at each play time? Is there supervision of the playground in the mornings prior to school commencing?
- Are parents actively encouraged to participate in the school program if they desire (canteen, reading groups, music classes)?
- Does the school cater for children with Additional Needs, or provide programs for children who are struggling with class work?
- Is the school Principle and Assistance Principle approachable and knowledgeable regarding the school. Have management and staff taken time to greet you and your child and begin getting to know you?
- Are there opportunities to meet other parents and become actively involved in fundraising and/ or decision making where appropriate (morning teas, P & C Meetings, fundraising events, etc)?
- Does the school have an enrichment program for gifted children?
- Does the school believe in operating composite classes, and if so, how are they structured to ensure all children are catered for? Has the teacher run a composite class before?
- Are there extra-curricular activities available for your child (sport, music, art and craft, performance and dance, debating, etc)?
- Does the school organise excursions to correspond with current classroom topics? Are parents encouraged to assist?
- Are there enough shaded areas for playtime during Summer months? What happens during wet weather?

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How Do I Know My Child Is Ready?

Starting school marks an important milestone in the lives of children and families. Many parents often ask the question - how do I know my child is ready to go to school? Most parents will begin to have an idea the year before starting as to whether their child may be ready, but for some parents, deciding whether your child should stay or go can be challenging. If possible, it is always important to communicate with your child's teacher and school about any thoughts and or concerns you may have prior to your child starting.

There are some questions for you to consider regarding when it is the best time to send your child.

Social Skills

Does your child:

- Share toys with others?
- Take turns and wait until it is their turn?
- Co-operate with adults and other children?
- Try to help other children when they are having difficulties?
- Show empathy towards other children when hurt?
- Play happily alone for 15-20 minutes?
- Play co-operatively in a small group of children?



Language Skills

Can your child:

- Express themselves so that others understand them?
- Follow a simple direction involving location words (next to, beside etc), shapes and sizes?
- Settle disagreements verbally without resorting to aggression?
- Express their needs and wants to adults so they are understood?
- Explain to others the difficulties they are having?
- Listen without interrupting?
- Identify different sounds?
- Understand instructions such as: 'start at the top of a page', 'go and sit behind the chair', 'wash your hands then go choose a book'?

Cognitive Skills

Is your child able to:

- Cope with noises and distractions from others?
- Follow simple group game rules?
- Finish and persist with a task once started?
- Remain seated at table activities for 10-15 minutes?
- Finish one activity before moving to another?
- Place a series of pictures into correct sequence?
- Determine which object/picture does not belong, is different, or is the same as the others?
- Provide possible solutions to simple problems?
- Answer simple questions with relevant answers?
- Follow the instructions of a simple board game (lotto, etc)?



Physical Skills

Does your child:

- Hold a pencil, crayon
- Manipulate scissors
- Stack a tower of
- Sit with their legs
- Climb up and over
- Use swings and
- Throw and catch a
- Play Statues, Hide and Seek or Chasing and Catch?



and paintbrush properly?
with ease?
blocks successfully?
crossed when on the floor?
climbing equipment easily?
slippery dips confidently?
large ball?

Emotional/ Self Help Skills



Can your child:

- Leave you willingly and without tears?
- Express their feelings without aggressive behaviour?
- Undo and do up buttons, zippers and press studs?
- Take plastic wrap off their sandwiches/biscuits?
- Eat a whole piece of fruit or peel a mandarin?
- Open their drink bottle or place a straw into a popper?
- Attempt new activities with enthusiasm?

These are all important skills that children must have some confidence and ability in to be able to cope with the demands of a normal school day. Practice can be provided at home to enable your child to become more skilled at these areas and activities.

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Activities That Help Prepare Your Child for School

There are lots of ways in which parents can assist children getting ready for school. These include:

- Ask your child to help peel fruits etc for morning and afternoon tea.
- Take lunch outside and have your child balance their lunchbox on their knees whilst they eat.
- Practice dressing and undressing skills with dolls and clothes.
- Allow your child the opportunity to learn to open all different types of containers, jars, boxes with lids, etc.
- Drawing and story writing
- Group games with rules (you may need to enlist some friends!)
- Practice at recognising and writing their own name (Foundation Script please - see Something Extra)
- Hand-eye coordination tracking games (tennis with a ball in a stocking, mini golf, etc)
- Follow the leader in a line
- Group ball games with rules (soccer, basketball, etc)
- Playing Hide and Seek



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What Can Parents Do Leading Up To Your Child's First Day?

Before starting school, follow some of these tips. Chances are your child will look forward to starting school as it will be familiar to them, and therefore the whole process will go more smoothly.

If you are buying them a new school bag, purchase it before they start school and have them use it at the preschool so they become familiar with it. The same applies for raincoats, jumpers, hats, etc. Familiar objects when your child first starts school will help them feel more secure.

Arrange to visit the school yard on weekends, and play on the equipment, find out where the drink fountains are, show them where the toilets are (children need to get used to the idea that there is a toilet for boys and a toilet for girls). This also assists in their feeling comfortable and secure.

Talk with the school administration and determine if there is a policy which allows for you to visit the school during school hours with your child so you can meet the teacher and allow your child to become familiar with the routine. Also find out about the school's Orientation program prior to starting.

When your child is at home with you, pack them lunches and drinks in their school lunch box, and give them

practice at being able to determine which is morning tea, what is lunch, and how to open up the plastic wrap or put the straw into the popper. When they first begin at school, let them help you pack their lunches so they know what they have to eat. Try to avoid junk food and provide sandwiches and things that are easy to eat. It can be a very long day for some children, and all the additional excitement makes them quite hungry and tired, so keep this in mind. Often children get so excited they eat all of their lunch box contents at recess, so make sure you explain to your child which piece of food is for which time. If it is easier initially, provide a brown paper lunch bag instead of a lunch box. These can be thrown away after use, and you don't have the worry about lost lunch box lids and the like.

If possible, involve your child in leisure and sport activities so that they become more accustomed to listening to and dealing with other adults and groups of children. Your local city council, sporting facilities and church groups generally provide low-grade minimal competition sports such as soccer, cricket, dance, football, netball, etc that may interest your child and help develop appropriate social and group skills.

It is important for parents to convey a positive attitude toward school so that children look forward to the exciting new challenge before them. Speaking of your own bad school experiences will only put unnecessary fears into children.

- Tell your child that school is fun
- Tell them they will play with lots of other children
- They will make many new friends
- They will learn all sorts of new things
- They will learn to read books.



Saying things like – “I can't wait until you're at school” or, “If you're naughty the teacher won't like you” give the impression that school is a place that is not very nice and not much fun.

Encourage your child to:

- Talk for themselves
- Dress themselves – including shoes & socks etc
- Feed themselves
- Pour their own drinks
- Put their own toothpaste on a brush
- Brush their own hair
- Develop problem-solving skills – don't always give the answer, but ask them questions so they work things out for themselves.
- Clean up after themselves
- Finish activities they start before moving on to another activity.



Teach your children – to go to the toilet themselves, wipe themselves properly. Flush the toilet and most importantly to wash their hands properly. You should establish a good toileting routine because at school they are expected to look after themselves completely. Nobody will be cleaning and disinfecting the toilet during the day or telling them to wash their hands and they will be sharing the toilet with several hundred other children!

Your child should also know:

- Their first name, their last name and their address
- How to listen to and follow instructions
- How to blow their nose when necessary
- To cover their mouth when they cough
- To wash and dry their hands thoroughly before eating
- To look at people when they speak or are spoken to
- How to use their manners – “please” and “thank you”



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On the Big Day!

It only seems like yesterday that you came home from hospital with that tiny bundle and now it is time for school.

Sometimes, the transition from preschool to school can be as difficult for parents as it is for children. Quite often there will be tears (from children and their parents!) and the best piece of advice to remember is that school is something that neither child nor parent can avoid, so it is often best for the parents to be firm. Children will try many tactics to stay at home with you. They will cry as you leave them and complain of phantom stomach aches and headaches. The quicker your child realises that regardless of the tactics they use to try to persuade you to let them stay at home that they have to go to school, the less trauma involved for all concerned.

If your child cries as you leave them, quietly reassure them that you will pick them up that afternoon, and then go. Don't persist in trying to placate your child, as this will only make the situation worse. Teachers are well trained in handling littlies on their first few days, so let your child's teacher assist you to manage the situation.

Being organised in advance will help both you and your child enjoy the big day.

Here are a few tips:

- Make sure everything is labeled with your child's name (including shoes & socks etc.)
- Leave for school in plenty of time.
- Let your child help to pack his/her bag
- Say goodbye firmly and cheerfully at the door
- Arrive early in the afternoon so you are there when your child comes out of school (It is very hard on children if they are the last one to be picked up).
- Be interested in what happened at school but not overly inquisitive - no one likes 20 questions after a long day!
- Don't forget to pack the camera!