

Starting school is an exciting time of change for children. There is a lot to get used to and some children will adapt more easily than others.

School days can be tiring too, for children who are used to a rest during the day. They often have to cope with new routines, bigger buildings, and lots more children who are older and bigger. There are different rules to get used to and many new things they are expected to do. Children need lots of support from you before starting school. There are things you can do to prepare your child for school and to support them in the first few weeks.

Is your child ready for school?

Not all children are ready to begin school at age five and they do not have to start school in the ACT until they are six.

Some children benefit greatly from extra maturity and it can help them if they start a bit later.

Think about this if your child is smaller or younger than the other children or is not yet really comfortable playing with groups of children or confident without adult support. Talk it over with the kindergarten or preschool teacher if he has one.

Preparing for school

It will help your child if you prepare her as well as you can, and show that you believe she will manage the new challenges.

Some things you can do are:

- Allow your child to take part in any transition to school activities organised by your kindergarten or childcare centre. These may include visits to the school.
- Kindergarten and childcare centre staff are also a good place to start if you have any questions about your child starting school.
- Show your child where the school is in relation to home. Walk there a few times if possible, even if you intend to drive to school.
- Show your child where you will pick her up at the end of the day.
- If your school is open to the public after hours, take your child for a walk around the school or play on the equipment while there is no-one there. Check with the school first.
- Make sure she has clothes she can manage; that she can unwrap her lunch and that she knows how to ask to go to the toilet.

- Read a story about a child who just started school, or tell about when you started school (as long as it's a happy story).
- Make enquiries with the kindergarten, childcare centre or school and, if possible, invite another child who will be starting at the same time, and her parent, over before school starts.
- Plan to take your child to school on the first day.
- If your child is worried about starting school, ask her what would help, for example, who should take her to school, where she wants to say goodbye, what she wants to do after school. Having some control over what happens helps with fears. You might tell her what you will be doing while she is at school.

Once at school

- Don't be late picking your child up. A few minutes can seem a long time to a young child, especially if he is not feeling sure of himself.
- Some children want to tell you all about their day as soon as you pick them up so, make time for your child after school if he needs it, or as soon as you get home if you work. Some children, however, like a while by themselves before they want company.
- Children are often 'starving' after school. A healthy snack straight after can make up for a missed lunch. This will be as important as eating a big dinner. If you are picking your children up in a car after school, take something (a piece of fruit) with you ready for them to eat in the car. In the first few weeks they might be too tired to really want to eat by dinnertime.
- Listen, but don't ask too many questions. Children will talk when they are ready. Bedtime is usually a good time to listen. Use prompts to help you understand their day, for example, 'What did you learn today?', 'Who did you play with?'



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Once at school *continued*

- Remember that reading stories to your child is always important. Reading together should be a regular and enjoyable part of your day. Children love being read to long after they have learned to read themselves, and this helps build and maintain your relationship
- Some children wet their pants in the early months at school. This can be very embarrassing for them. They need to be reassured that it often happens to children and it is nothing to worry about. Encourage your child to tell the teacher. Pack an extra pair of pants if it happens. If you show you are worried, it will make him feel that there really is something to worry about.
- New learning takes a long time and children learn at different rates. Don't expect too much. New learning takes a long time and children learn at different rates. You can help best by encouraging, taking an interest and showing you care.
- Be flexible in the early days of school. Children may be tired and grumpy for a while until they settle in.
- Keep to routines that allow time for rest and free play. Don't arrange too many after school activities or have too many things to do on the way home, for example, shopping.
- Invite your child's friends over. One at a time first.
- Talk to other parents and share your experiences, ideas and feelings.
- If your child is really upset, if you are worried, or there is bullying or teasing going on, talk to the teacher about it.
- Children need lots of support in starting school.

Starting school can be stressful

Some children, when they first start school, find it so stressful that they don't want to go. They may get tummy aches or be very tearful in the mornings. If this happens to your child listen to his fears. Try not to let him see that you are worried. Let him know that you believe that he can manage to go to school and you will help him. Ask him what he thinks would help, for example, sometimes going with another parent instead of you is a help.

For another child having something small of yours to mind while he is at school will help. If the worries don't get better soon, talk to the teacher about the best way to help your child.

Forcing children usually does more harm than good.

Reminders

- Starting school is a big step for children and it takes time to get used to.
- Children do best at school when their parents and teachers work together to support them.
- Let the teacher know if anything is happening in your family that might continue to upset your child at school.
- Tell the teacher when you are pleased with what is happening at school and when you are concerned.

Contacts

Child and Family Centres (parenting information and support)	9am–5pm Monday–Friday: Gungahlin	6207 0120
	9am–5pm Monday–Friday: Tuggeranong	6207 8228
	9am–5pm Monday–Friday: West Belconnen	6205 2904
Maternal and Child Health	8am–5pm Monday–Friday	6207 9977
Parentline ACT	9am–9pm Monday–Friday, except public hols	6287 3833

Websites

www.cyh.com	Parenting and child health information
www.det.act.gov.au	Education and Training Directorate
www.parentlink.act.gov.au	Other parenting guides, including Bullying, Coping skills, Optimism, Self esteem
www.raisingchildren.net.au	Raising Children Network—covering topics for parenting newborns to teens

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