



School can be a strange and scary place for beginners. Young children usually have to cope with bigger buildings, lots more children who are older and bigger and less adults for support. There are different rules to get used to and many new things that they are expected to do. The playtime breaks, especially, can be very frightening for beginners. School days can be very tiring too, for children who are used to a rest during the day. Children may have been looking forward to school a lot and feel very let down if they don't enjoy it as much as they hoped. Even for those who do enjoy it, starting school is stressful. Children need lots of support from you before starting school and especially in the first few weeks.

*This PEG uses 'he' and 'she' in turn.
Change to suit your child's sex.*

What parents can do

Is your child ready for school?

Not all children are ready to begin school at the age of five and they do not have to start school in South Australia until they are six. Some children benefit greatly from the extra year of maturity before they start school 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 at the same time show her that you have confidence that she will manage the new challenges. It will help if she clearly knows where school is in relation to home - if you can, walk there with your child a few times even if you normally intend to drive.

Help your child become familiar with school by visiting before (some kindergartens also arrange this), driving past often and talking about what will happen.

Some schools are open to the public after hours so you can walk through and play on the equipment when other children are not around (check with the school first).

- Show your child over the school so she knows where she will be going, where the toilets are (and try them out) and where you will pick her up.
- Prepare your child for what will happen. Make sure she has clothes that she can manage, that she can unwrap her lunch and that she knows how to ask to go to the toilet.
- Some other things you may need to prepare your child for.
 - The school bell or siren and what it means.
 - How to drink from a water fountain.
 - Putting up a hand to ask a question.
 - Read a story about a child who just started school, or tell about when you started school (as long as it has a happy ending).
 - If your child is anxious about leaving you, ask her what would help, eg who should drop her off at school, where she wants to say goodbye, what she wants to wear and what she wants to do after school etc. Having some control over what happens helps with fears. You might tell her what you'll be doing while she's at school.
- It can help your child if they know other children starting school at the same time. Make enquiries with the school and if possible invite another child and her parent over before school starts. Some preschool and kindergartens have a number of children starting school at the same time so this makes it easier.

Once at school

- 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.
- Talk to other parents and share your experiences, ideas and feelings.
- Don't be late picking your child up. A few minutes can seem a long time when you are not very sure of yourself.
- 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 due to excitement or anxiety. 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 listening time.
- It helps if you read stories to children even after they can read themselves. Bedtime is also a good time to read stories.
- 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, eg shopping.
- Invite your child's friends over. One at a time at first.
- Some children get upset if they haven't learnt to read on the first day. Remind your child of all the things he can read such as his name, road signs, and names on food packets.

- 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.

Note: 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, eg 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 support each other.**
- **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.**

Want more information?

Parenting SA – www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Child and Youth Health for parenting and child health information – www.cyh.com

See other Parent Easy Guides (PEGs):

- Bullying
- Optimism

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Parent Helpline
1300 364 100

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