

Preparing Your Child for the First Day of School

No matter what grade your child is entering, it is important to prepare properly for this annual transition. Get a head start on all the necessary preparations well before the first day of school, and talk to your child about what to expect during the academic year ahead.

Before School Begins

- **Check up on your child's health:** Have them visit the doctor and dentist for an exam before that first day of class, and check to see that their immunizations are up to date.
- **Get acquainted:** Introduce a young child to their teacher, and visit the school prior to the first day of class – especially if your child is entering kindergarten or is transferring from another school.
- **Create a budget:** Think about what school supplies and other items your child will need, and budget accordingly for what you can afford.
- **Make a list of needed supplies:** Consider what items have to be purchased prior to the first day of school, such as:
 - **Clothing:** Take an inventory of what your child already has and what is needed. Coats, jackets, jeans, tops, uniforms (if necessary) and other wardrobe items should be in good condition, fit well, be made of durable fabrics, and be easy to wash and care for. Check the school's dress code for permissible attire.
 - **Footwear:** Check the school's dress code for the types of shoes allowed. Buy durable, easy-to-care-for footwear that is water-resistant and appropriate for the school activity.
 - **Backpacks, bags and lunchboxes:** Choose durable items that are water- and wear-resistant, lightweight, and easy to tote.
 - **Various school supplies:** Paper, pens, pencils, markers, erasers, a ruler, a dictionary and other items are musts for elementary school students. But avoid buying too many school supplies before the first day of class. It is often best to talk to the teacher and find out what items are needed for class before making your purchases to avoid unnecessary spending.
- **Write your child's name, address and phone number on the inside of their coat, backpack or bag, and lunchbox.** Never write this information on the outside or in a conspicuous place where strangers can see it.
- **Arrange to have their hair cut at least a few days before class begins.**
- **Start an earlier, consistent bedtime routine at least a few days before the first day of school.** This will help your child get used to going to bed and waking up earlier than they were accustomed to during the break.

Back to School Transitions

The transition back to school usually requires a stricter time schedule and adjusting to a new classroom, new teachers or new academic challenges. Younger children can easily become overwhelmed by the idea of starting a new school or a new caregiving arrangement.

Parents can help to ease any stress or anxiety that their children are experiencing by trying to view the situation from the children's perspective. Use the following tips to help make going back to school a pleasurable experience:

- **Prepare in advance:** Knowing what to expect can help make children, especially younger children, more comfortable. Before the new school year begins, take the time to talk to your children about how their daily routines will change. Some children may enjoy creating a pictorial chart to include each step of the morning schedule.
- **Try getting up earlier:** Get up early a couple of days before the new school year begins to help your children adjust to the new routine. This may prevent them from being confused, groggy, cranky or refusing to get out of bed on the first day of school.
- **Discuss how things will be different from last year:** Many schools and child care professionals invite families to visit the classroom and new teacher before the school year begins. If this will be your child's first experience with a new school, take advantage of these opportunities to meet the teacher or caregiver and to find the classroom, the bathroom and the playground.
- **Reading books with children is a great way to introduce any experience:** They can see how other children beginning school or a new program have the same feelings of uncertainty and how they overcome them.
- **Involve children in preparing for school:** For example, they can lay out clothes, pack a backpack, or select a favorite toy or photo to take with them to the program.
- **Talk about feelings:** Encourage children to describe how they feel about the "new year," and try to ease any fears they may have.
- **Recognize your own feelings:** Parents may feel sad or fearful about their children going off to kindergarten or being transferred to a learning environment for older children. If your emotions are too obvious, you may spoil your child's enthusiasm for the first day. Exude confidence and good feelings when saying goodbye.
- **Remain calm if your child resists getting up for school:** Try not to raise your voice if your child resists getting up from bed, brushing their teeth, or getting dressed, and expect an occasional meltdown before school some mornings. Beginning something new can be stressful, and adjustments take a lot of concentration and effort. Child care professionals, teachers and families should expect a few tears and other emotional displays from young children.
- **Arrive at the new school or program early on the first few days to help your child settle in:** The teacher or caregiver may also be available to talk one-on-one with your child before the day's learning begins.
- **Arrange for predictable pick-up schedules:** Children need to feel confident from the beginning that they can count on a loved one to pick them up on time after school. Use the commute to ease the transition between school and home.

How adults handle transitional situations can set the stage for how well a child adjusts to other challenges in life. Parents, caregivers, and teachers can help them adapt by making preparations in advance, clearly explaining the changes about to take place and listening if doubts or fears develop.

Back to School: Healthy Habits

School is about to be back in session. To get the year off to a good start, begin practicing healthy habits now to ensure optimal learning experiences and overall well-being.

Healthy Eating

What are some benefits of incorporating nutrient-dense foods?

Stronger immune system. A nutrient-dense diet helps the production and activity of immune cells and antibodies. Diets that are high in processed foods and refined sugars can negatively affect a healthy immune system.

Consider incorporating:

- Whole fruits and vegetables: citrus fruits (grapefruit, oranges, lemon, lime, tangerine), papaya, kiwi, red bell peppers, broccoli, spinach
- Nuts and seeds: almonds, sunflower seeds
- Immune boosting spices: turmeric, ginger

Enhanced mental performance. Nutrient-dense foods can positively impact productivity, attention and steady energy levels, leading to optimal learning experiences.

Consider incorporating:

- Healthy fats: avocado, nuts, seeds
- Fiber: whole-wheat grains, oatmeal, greens, sweet potato, beans, legumes

Practicing Good Hygiene

Practicing behaviors at home that support good hygiene can help students avoid illness as they return to school.

What are some behaviors to practice at home?

- Covering your mouth with a tissue, or using your elbow, when coughing or sneezing
- Throwing tissues into the trash right away
- Frequent hand washing
- Avoiding touching your face
- Frequent cleaning of high-touch surfaces

How do children benefit from practicing these behaviors in the home?

- Enhanced self-awareness and social-awareness. Given the recent pandemic, it's more important than ever to understand how we can safely interact with others and how our actions affect others. By helping children understand and adapt to new social norms and behaviors, we support their well-being, both emotionally and socially.
- Avoid bringing germs back into the home. If children implement behaviors that support good hygiene during the day, they are less likely to bring germs back into the home and less likely to expose family to potentially harmful germs.

Healthy Sleep Habits

What are some benefits of incorporating healthy sleep habits?

- Enhanced immune health. When we get the appropriate amount of sleep, we get sick less often.
- Better mood. Getting enough sleep helps reduce stress, improves mood and supports mindfulness.
- Enhanced mental performance. With enough sleep, we can think more clearly and do better in school or when performing tasks that require focus and attention.

How can you support healthy sleep habits at home?

- Implement and maintain an appropriate sleep schedule. If possible, implement the sleep schedule two weeks or so before your child's return to school. Each night and each morning, set an incrementally earlier bedtime and wake up time, ensuring your child receives the appropriate amount of sleep for their age by the time they wake up for school.
- Establish a relaxing bedtime routine. Set aside time before bedtime to help your child relax and unwind. Engage your child in activities that are calming, such as bath or reading time, and avoid any screen time.
- Avoid big meals, caffeine or high-sugar foods close to bedtime. Heavy meals close to bedtime can negatively impact sleep quality and may prevent your child from falling asleep.