

Ten top tips for a great start to school

When your child starts school it can be quite overwhelming for you too!

It is important you try to relax and enjoy this time with your child. If you feel calm and show you are comfortable about your child starting school, they will feel happier too.

If you have any queries or concerns about your child's readiness for school, you can contact your:

- child health nurse
- school health nurse
- school teacher
- local Child Development Service.

IMPORTANT MESSAGE FOR PARENTS

Make sure your child receives their four year old vaccinations. Please show your child's immunisation record to school staff.

This brochure can be made available in alternative formats on request. Please contact childcommunity@health.wa.gov.au

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Going to school for the first time is a big event for you and your child! There are lots of things you can do to help your child prepare for school. Here are some suggestions:

1. Talking about feelings

Starting school is exciting but can also be overwhelming for some children. Shyness and anxiety in new situations is common and learning to be apart from parents can sometimes be difficult.

- Talk positively about going to school, making new friends and about some of the experiences your child will have, such as learning new songs, painting and playing outside.
- Encourage your child to talk about how they are feeling before, on and after the first few days.
- Try a 'practice run' - visit the school so your child knows where they are going and what to expect.
- When you arrive at school, spend a short amount of time with your child and, when it is time for you to leave, tell your child you're going and when you will be back. Always be there at the specified time.

2. Getting enough sleep

- Your child needs a good night's sleep for their brain to be ready to learn (about 10 to 12 hours).
- It helps to have 'wind down' time and dim the lights to help prepare for sleep. Set up a nice, relaxing bedtime routine, e.g. bath, a drink, cuddle, story, kiss and 'goodnight'.
- The half hour before bed is not a good time for tickles, TV or other excitement.

3. Book sharing

Read lots and lots of books! Have a special time each day to read stories together – sit comfortably so your child can see the book and your facial expressions, and so you can see theirs.

- Show your child how to open the book, point to the title of the story, the letters, words and pictures so they will know what it means.
- Read nursery rhymes and old favourites again and again.
- Get your child involved in the story and ask open ended questions, for example, 'What do you think will happen next?'

4. Learning to make friends and pretend play

At school, children learn to make friends, share and take turns.

- Create opportunities for your child to socialise with others outside the family.
- You could have other children over to play or join a playgroup. See www.playgroupwa.com.au for more details.
- Pretend play such as tea parties, going to the shops, and superheroes are a big part of school. Let your child use their imagination. A shoe box can become a toy car or a doll's bed!

5. Playgrounds and parks

Having fun at the park is great as it provides lots of chances to enjoy the swings, slide and other equipment. By doing physical activity like this:

- Your child's muscles will get stronger and it prepares them for outdoor play at school. Make sure they are well supervised when playing.
- A part of the brain is used which can help kids concentrate, so it is helpful to do some physical activity before a sit down activity, e.g. play at the park before sitting down to read a book.



6. Speaking and listening

Listening and understanding – This includes following instructions and being aware of what other people are saying. If your child is finding this tricky you can try:

- Waiting – give time for your child to answer or do the task.
- Repeating what was said or breaking it down into smaller parts.
- Using less words and explaining the meaning of new words.
- Giving them a clue like, 'You cut with the...?'
- Giving a choice like, 'Do we use a cup for drinking or eating?'

Expressing thoughts and ideas – Commenting, negotiating, asking for things and greeting people are all important skills at school. If your child finds this tricky you can:

- Encourage your child to make comments, e.g. 'Dad is swimming!'
- If they make a mistake, say the word back to them correctly.
- Ask them to show you what they need if they can't say it in words.
- Give lots of praise for trying.



7. Classroom crafts

Make sure your child has lots of chances to play with the things they will be using in school, like scissors, pencils and paint. This way your child should feel confident to use them at school.

Using scissors – In school children will be encouraged to cut on a line so start practising holding scissors and snipping paper (with supervision). It's important to have a good technique when cutting. The main points are:

- Thumb in top hole of scissors and thumb on top when holding paper.
- Turn the paper and move your hands when you turn a corner.

Drawing – At school, children do lots of drawing. Some great ideas to practise are:

- Draw simple shapes like lines and circles – this is the first step *before* learning how to write their name. Try drawing in sand or with chalk!
- Show your child how to do it first and then they can copy you.

Pencil grasp – Holding a pencil or crayon properly means:

- Holding pencil near the end (use a sticker or dot to show where fingers go).
- Using three or four fingers, NOT holding with a fist.

8. Getting dressed

It is helpful for school children to be able to dress and undress themselves. You can help by:

- Dressing your child for school, remembering they may be playing outside or painting.
- Helping your child to choose clothes they can manage on their own.
- Practising dressing – you complete the first part of each piece of clothing and then let the child complete the rest, gradually letting the child do more until they do it all themselves.
- Practising with dress-up play or with dolls.

9. Healthy eating

Healthy lunches and snacks help with concentration and learning. You can try:

- A practise picnic. Check your child can open containers and manage their food.
- Encouraging your child to be involved, e.g. packing their own lunch box.
- Including plenty of vegetables, fresh fruit, cheese, yoghurt, lean meat, wholemeal bread and a bottle of water. Remember to start the day with a healthy breakfast!



10. Going to the toilet

To help your child manage the toilet at school give them chances to undo, pull down and do up their clothes, flush the toilet and wash their hands without your help.