



Getting ready for school – practical tips for smoothing the transition

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Starting BIG SCHOOL is a big step for children and their families. It can be an exciting time where new friendships are forged. New experiences provide challenges and opportunities for learning.

We have found it helpful to prepare our children and ourselves for this change. In this way we can help make this transition a relaxed and happy one.

The following are some tips based on ideas and experiences drawn from children, their families and teachers.

We wish you well in this exciting new journey.

Group Size

- Talk to your child about there being one teacher for each class at Kindy.
- If possible, offer your time to help in any way you can or if needed in the classroom; this will increase the staff/child ratio for periods of time.

Learning at School

- Discussion about school often involves talking about learning to read – let your child know that they will not learn to read by the end of their first day!
- Whilst there are broad group outcomes at school, children will continue to acquire skills at different times.

Watch the Pace!

- School can bring an increase in demands on your child and a greater need for time out at the end of the day. Don't be tempted to involve your child in too many after school activities. Children need time out after school.
- Be aware of introducing too many new things at once. Children could be tired.
- Explain to your child that he/she will go to school every weekday i.e. five days.
- Opportunities for free play, social interaction and relaxing are important.

- Consider your own agenda and how that could impact on your child's day e.g. doing the shopping after school.
- Behaviours can become challenging when children are tired.

Playground

- Find out if your school has a 'buddy system' and how this works.
- Allow your child to take a small and inexpensive toy to play with; also explain that it's OK if the toy gets lost – otherwise lost toys could add stress and anxiety to your child's day. Choose a toy or game that your child is good at. N.B. Find out if toys from home are allowed in the playground.
- Do lots of visits with your child to the playground – talk about boundaries; visit when there are children around.
- Opportunities for play time with a favourite friend outside of school hours can help to enhance a possible friendship.
- Talk about what happens at recess and lunch, e.g. the children sit on the benches to eat and then can play. You could make a story about this.

Learning Links is a non-profit charity assisting children who have difficulty learning and their families.

We raise funds to help children from birth to 18 years by offering a range of services including the following.

Early Childhood Services for children from birth to six years.

- Early childhood intervention and support for very young children.
- An inclusive preschool for children with and without special needs.
- An assessment and consultancy service for families who are concerned about their young child's development.
- Specialist early childhood teaching and therapy.

School Age Services for children from Kindergarten to Year 12 who have low support needs.

- Comprehensive assessments.
- Small group tuition and therapy.
- Occupational and speech therapy programs combining specialist education services and therapy.
- Outreach programs.
- The Ronald McDonald Learning Program for seriously ill children and the Reading for Life Program for children falling behind in their reading.

Family Services helping and supporting families and health professionals.

- Centre and home-based family counselling.
- Parenting Programs and groups for families.
- Case Management Services.

Professional Development for teachers and health professionals.

Presentations, workshops and advice on identifying and helping children with learning difficulties, learning disabilities and developmental delays.

Learning Links has branches in six Sydney locations at Peakhurst, Penshurst, Fairfield, Miller, Dee Why and Randwick. We also offer some services to children in country NSW, the ACT, Victoria and New Zealand. A complete list of branch locations and contact numbers is on the back cover.

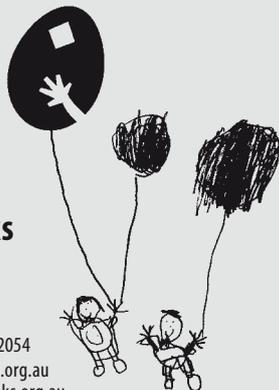
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Labelling

- Include a special set of key rings or ribbons as a gift for Christmas – put the identifying feature on the front and back of your child's school bag.
- Identify all your child's belongings – have all belongings labelled by name. Check frequently that your child's name is still marked (names on clothing may fade in the wash).
- A bright sticker inside shoes is a good idea – lots of pairs of black leather shoes are similar!
- Choose clothing/shoes that your child can independently dress and undress e.g. velcro shoes.
- As tempting as it is to leave new school uniforms and shoes as 'special' for the first day, allow your child to become familiar with these items by wearing them around the house and showing them to friends and family.
- Uniforms can feel different and perhaps restrictive.
- New shoes take time to wear in – blisters are uncomfortable!!

Toilets

- Go to the school and visit the school's toilets; ensure your child knows where they are and how to close and open the doors. (There could be "engaged" locks on the doors.)
- Show your child how to recognise the boys and girls toilets – there may not be a picture, just a word.
- Familiarise boys with a urinal.
- Find out if there are 'warning' bells before the end of recess and lunch to remind your child to go to the toilet.
- Check whether your child can undress and redress to use the toilet – look for easy options with the clothing.
- If your child needs assistance with toileting then school staff will need to know so they can arrange for appropriate assistance.

Following Directions

- Give your child specific practice with following directions beginning with those your child is motivated to follow – give specific praise about how your child followed the direction e.g. it's so great you did ... you listened to me and did what I asked you to do. You're going to be such a help to your teacher ...

Meal Times

- Let your child know they do not need to eat everything before playing – slower eaters may miss out on play time.
- Separate recess and lunch so your child has food remaining for lunch.
- Wrap food in foil or paper wrap that can be easily opened, as glad wrap can be tricky to unwrap.
- Buy a lunch box and drink bottle that your child can open independently – and is also able to close so that lids don't become lost.
- Pack enough food for your child – non-perishable items are a great idea; they can be eaten the next day or on the way home.
- Many schools now do not allow peanut butter.
- In warmer months, freeze half your child's drink before adding the rest. Insulation bags are a great idea.
- Put a special note or photo in your child's lunch box.
- Let your child practise using their lunch box and drink bottle – go on picnics to the park in the holidays and sit at a park bench to eat, to learn to balance the food and drink in a new position.
- Involve your child in choices about food for school e.g. do you want ... or ...?

Arrival, Separation and Picking Up

- Create a routine for separating from your child.
- Arrive at school at the same time each day.
- Help your child know what time you leave to go to school.
- Pick up and drop off your child from the same place each day.
- Tell your child you will be back to pick them up and when that will be.
- Arrive before the bell so your child does not fret when they see other parents arrive.
- Remember, children's expectations are based on information and attitudes they receive from others. Be excited about school – talk about all the good things your child will do there.



What's the Schedule?

- Find out what your child's weekly classroom routine is.
- Together with your child make a visual routine. By talking about what will happen each day your child will feel more prepared, less anxious, confident and safe in the new school environment. Packing the bag the night before adds to your child's preparation.

Lining Up

- Talk with your child about what 'lining up' is.
- Play 'lining up' games – use words of position: in front, behind, holding hands, pairs, partners etc.

No Hats – No Play

- Buy a spare hat – if one goes missing or is misplaced the spare one can be used. This will save potential anxiety and the child missing out on play time.

Be Ready

- Pack your child's bag together the night before school – this will help your child prepare for what is happening tomorrow at school and will also help ensure a smooth calm morning!

Tips for New School Starters

Meeting New Teachers

- Introduce yourself to the child's teacher.
- If relevant, volunteer to help in the classroom, e.g. to help with reading groups.
- For a more in depth discussion, ask the teacher if you can make a time to talk to him or her about your child's progress.
- Get to know the administration staff at the school. They can help with general questions and information about what is happening at school.
- Beginning school is much like starting a new job – first relationships must be formed. Good relationships can pave the way for a successful partnership with your child's teacher and education.

Tips for Making Friends

- Talk to your child about the meaning of friendship.
- Teach your child to laugh off teasing moments.
- Explain to your child that they are one of many children in a class.
- Make your home a place where your child feels valued and loved.
- Open your doors to your child's new friends.
- Explain that sometimes during playtime you may lose sight of your new friends. Tell them that it's O.K. if this happens and they can't find them quickly, suggest they go to the library if it's open, see the teacher on playground duty if they feel upset, or just sit down and watch the other kids until they see someone you know.

- Encourage your child to take 2 or 3 inexpensive pocket size toys to school to play with them. These small toys are sure to attract other children. The toys can then be shared and friendships formed. This also helps stop a child feeling alone in the playground.
- If your child has a birthday in first term, organise a birthday party and invite classmates. That way your child will be easily recognised by the other children and find it easier to make friends.

Tips for Lunches

- Use sandwich wrap or sandwich bags rather than cling wrap, as they are easier to open for little hands.
- Pack small pieces of fruit.
- Peel oranges.
- Re-use new pop-tops and fill with your own juice to avoid lost lids and expensive drink bottles.
- Make sure the lunchbox is one with the lid attached to avoid lost lids.
- Don't pack dairy snacks or meat fillings in sandwiches on hot days.
- Pack 'little lunch' or 'morning tea' separate from 'big lunch'.
- Label lunch boxes and drink bottles and check occasionally if the labels have worn off.
- Remember that children need healthy food for school-time staying power.
- And, for Mum, clean out food scraps from bags as often as possible (before the smell overwhelms you).

Tips for Reading Success

- Regularly read to your child.
- Make reading time a special time ... sit closely, cuddle, and give lots of smiles.
- Let your child see you reading for pleasure and information.
- Take your child to the library.
- Don't pressure your child to read books independently.

Tips for travelling to and from School

- Drop off and pick-up your child from the same point each day – some Kindergartens require you to come to the room to collect your child.
- If your child must cross a road independently – practice, practice and practice again.
- Attach bus passes firmly to school bags.
- Teach your child their address and phone number to a familiar nursery rhyme melody.

Tips for Hot Days

- Don't overdress your child in summer.
- Ask teachers to enforce the rule 'No Hat, No Play', although a lot of schools already do this.
- Apply sunscreen before your child leaves home.
- Keep a stick-style sunscreen applicator in your child's bag.
- Freeze drinks and wrap in plastic.



Tips for Homework

- Set aside a regular time for homework.
- Keep a handy supply of sharpened pencils, glue, scissors, a rubber, coloured pencils, ruler, plastic letters, bread counters, times table chart, alphabet or sound chart, and number chart in one place such as a tray or basket.
- Divide homework into achievable sections each day.
- Encourage your child to complete a small section of homework each day rather than completing the entire week's homework in one setting.
- Let your child's teacher know if homework is taking too long or distressing your child.
- Collect different coloured plastic bread discs that are useful for counting and assisting with maths homework. One colour can be used for single numbers and the other for lots of ten.

- Buy or make a times table chart or placemat and place beside child when completing maths homework.
- Buy plastic letters and use to assist spelling. When using a sound eg. 'at', you can set up the 'at' and get the child to add other letters to see which ones make a word and which ones don't.

Tips for School Uniform and School Bag

- Buy velcro, buckles or slip-on boots if possible rather than shoes with laces.
- If possible, choose t-shirts and skivvies rather than shirts that button.
- Choose pants, t-shirts, shorts and socks that are loose fitting and easy to put on.
- Choose pants with elastic waistbands rather than zips and buttons.
- When buying a school bag, make sure your child can open and close the bag by him/herself before you buy it.

- If the bag is a back pack, carefully fit the straps so that the back is not placing undue strain on your child's back – make sure it does not hang down too far from their shoulders.
- Have all clothes and belongings clearly marked with your child's name and teach your child how to recognise their name.
- Show your child where their name is on their belongings.
- If you buy iron-on labels for clothing, you may also like to use a felt pen as well to put your child's name on the tags – to avoid problems if a label falls off or is ripped off.
- Attach a distinctive keyring or other object to their school bag to make identification easy.
- Make sure extra underpants and perhaps shorts are in their school bag in case of accidents.
- Library Bags can be easily made out of a cot size pillowcase. Just thread some cord through the hemmed edge.

Hints for packing lunches

Encouragement of good eating habits starts in the early years. Here are some helpful hints when preparing lunches for preschool or school.

Choosing a variety of foods is always important and even if children have their favourites it is wise to encourage new and different food experiences.

Don't forget meal appeal. Food that looks attractive is more likely to be eaten and enjoyed. Choose food that will carry without spoiling. Pack carefully and don't forget to label the lunch box.

Morning/Afternoon

This is a great time to try new foods with friends. It is an important part of the day and generates much discussion.

Please add something different regularly to your child's container. Why not try the fruits in season?

In our experience, children enjoy:

- Carrot
- Celery
- Sultanas
- Honeydew
- Watermelon
- Mandarins
- Beans
- Pears
- Kiwi Fruit
- Pineapple
- Cucumber
- Capsicum

Lunch Time Foods

- Sandwiches or Rolls – There are many varieties of bread, all are suitable so try including breads such as Pita, Lebanese, Lavash, and Rye. Wholemeal is a great choice.

Examples of suitable sandwich fillings:

- meat paste mixed with a little chutney,
- salmon or tuna mixed with finely chopped gherkin and flavoured with mayonnaise,
- cottage cheese mixed with finely chopped gherkin,
- mashed or curried egg with finely chopped celery,

- fish paste and celery,
- vegemite and finely shredded cabbage,
- grated cheese, and
- grated carrot.

- Baked beans or spaghetti – remember to pack a spoon.
- Salads – these are good finger foods.
- Baked vegetable slices – Choose ones that pack well, for example, Zucchini Slice.
- Fruit – whole, fruit salad, snack pack style.
- Yoghurt – plain or fruit.
- Custard.

There are many more suitable foods and food combinations including fefafel, lentils, beans, rotis and pasta dishes.



Snack Foods

Nutritious snacks will not only satisfy the appetite but will help promote good health. Good snack choices to go with sandwiches include the following.

- Fruit – fresh cut into pieces or left whole. Commercially prepared snack pack style fruit is also suitable.
- Vegetables – such as raw celery and carrot sticks, cooked jacket potatoes.
- Bread and Cereal Foods – Fruit bread or buns, muffins, bagels, wholemeal scones, crispbread and sandwiches (triangles, pin wheels and ribbon).
- Dairy foods – Cheese, yoghurt, long life milk-drinks.

Drinks

Children are often thirsty, especially if the weather is hot or if they have been active.

Water is the best drink to quench thirst

Most children enjoy water if they get into the habit of drinking it at an early age. We encourage the children to drink fluids regularly. The children can get to their drink bottle if they are thirsty so have enough water for the whole day.

Freezing a half full bottle and topping it up in the morning keeps the drink cold for most of the day.

At main meal time water, juice or long life milk drinks are suitable and easy to pack.

Remember juice does not contain calcium and should not replace milk.

A Note about Milk

Milk is not often available during the day at preschool and school, so it's a good idea to include milk for breakfast and afternoon tea.

Cow's milk should not replace breast milk or formula until baby is at least nine months and preferably twelve months of age. Cheese, custard and yoghurt are generally O.K. after six months of age.

After nine months, cow's milk is an important source of calcium and children should be having at least 600ml of milk each day.

Full cream, powdered, evaporated and UHT (longlife) milk are suitable alternative to fresh milk. When making powdered and evaporated milk follow directions carefully to be sure of correct strength.

Full cream milk supplies calcium, protein, energy and vitamins A and D. Full cream milk should be given each day.

Varieties of non dairy milks are available these days but not all are suitable substitutes for cow's milk. Goat and soy milk are not necessarily suitable substitutes for a child who has a true cow's milk allergy. Note that soy milk does not naturally contain calcium. If soy milk is to be used check the nutrition panel on the side of the pack to see whether it contains at least 100mg of calcium per 100ml of milk.

NSW Health has a brochure on Easy Lunch and Snack ideas for Children. It is available on www.health.nsw.gov.au or telephone (02) 9816 0452. The Children's Hospital at Westmead has some great fact sheets on food (including allergies), snack and lunchbox ideas and tucker without tantrums as well as lots of other topics. Some fact sheets are available in other languages.

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– contact your local branch

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– contact your local branch

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