

# School Holiday Parent Kit

## GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL

Starting school should be an enjoyable and positive experience, giving children the opportunity to make new friends and experience new things.

In Australia, most children start school at the age of five years. As starting school represents a major change in children's lives, they need to become familiar with the school environment. This means learning new rules, adjusting to a new routine and meeting new people. For many children it may also be their first time away from their parents or carers.

While starting school has the potential to be quite scary for children, there are many simple things you can do to make the transition easier. A few simple strategies can turn this potentially daunting experience into a time of joy, exploration and learning.

Age is almost universally used to decide when children are ready to start school, but researchers have also identified important skills that help children to be 'school ready'.

For example, two of the most important skills for children to learn before starting school are the ability to make friends and communicate with teachers and peers.

### HELPING YOUR CHILD TO BE READY FOR SCHOOL

Below are some strategies that can help prepare your child for school. The tips have been grouped into four categories, however, many of the activities help develop skills in more than one area.

### SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE

- Ensure your child has regular contact with other children before starting school. This helps them learn how to make friends.
- Introduce games:
  - that involve taking turns, such as playing on a swing or jumping on a trampoline
  - where they have to share or play cooperatively to attain a joint or an individual goal, such as sharing coloured pencils or building a sandcastle
  - of chance, where children can learn to lose gracefully, such as board games like snakes and ladders.
- Encourage your child to come up with a fair solution if conflict arises. Sit down with them and help them sort through the conflict.
- Make them aware of rules and the reasons for having them. For example, when holding your child's hand to cross at pedestrian lights, talk about why you cross only when the 'green person' walks.

- Use positive labels to help build your child's self-esteem such as 'helpful', 'kind', 'responsible', 'grown up' and avoid using negative ones. Refer to negative behaviour in terms of the event. For example saying "that wasn't a very sensible thing to do," labels the act rather than the personality.
- If your child sees you being kind and helpful to your family and friends, they will learn from your behaviour. If you are often angry and solve conflict by shouting or being aggressive, they are likely to imitate this way of responding.
- Recognise your child when they do something well. Behaviour is more likely to change with praise, rather than punishment.

During the first few weeks, in particular, it's important that you ask questions about your child's day to encourage them to talk about school at home.

### TIP

*Children who have been to preschool or child care often find the transition to school easier.*

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### Language

- Talk to your child, ask them questions and listen to what they have to say.
- Help them learn to follow simple instructions. Ask them to do things that will help you as well, such as getting food out of the fridge. Make sure you thank them so that they feel appreciated.
- Read to your child. Children are better readers when they have been read to often.

### Physical and motor development

- Make sure your child is well rested and has a balanced diet.
- Play games together, such as kicking a ball, obstacle courses, skipping and hopping games.
- Limit TV viewing.
- Involve your child in a sport they enjoy, for example a kinder gym, little athletics club, soccer or a ballet class.

### General knowledge and skills

- Teach your child to dress themselves, tie shoe laces, use velcro or buckles.
- Make sure they can go to the toilet by themselves.
- Teach them to write their name.
- Visit museums, galleries, the beach, the park, go for walks and see friends.

### PRACTICAL TIPS BEFORE STARTING SCHOOL

- Drive past the school a few times so that the school becomes a familiar place for your child.
- Before school starts, tell the principal if your child has any medical conditions, allergies or special needs.
- If available, attend an orientation program so that you and your child can meet the teacher and see the classroom.
- Show your child where to put their things, such as their school bag and hat.

- If possible, visit the school when other children are there so that they can get used to the 'big' children, the playground and the noise.
- Show your child where the toilets and bubblers are and how to use them.
- Make sure they know where to wait for you in the afternoon or where to go for after school care.
- Check with the school or other parents that your child has everything they need, such as a school bag, library bag and hat.
- Introduce your child to other children in the neighbourhood who will also be starting school.
- Explain some of the rules, such as putting your hand up to speak, asking before you go to the toilet, sitting quietly, doing as the teacher asks and not going outside the school fence.
- Practice unwrapping school lunches and drinking from drink bottles.

### BECOME INVOLVED IN THE SCHOOL

By becoming involved in the school, you can help to bridge the gap between home and school. You can do this by:

- going to any school meetings and talking to other parents

- introducing yourself to your child's teacher
- introducing yourself to other parents at the school
- organising car pools or walking to school with other children or families who live nearby.

If you have time you can volunteer to attend school excursions or participate in activities such as reading groups.

### SAFE SCHOOL TRAVEL

Some safety tips for when you drop off and pick up your child from school include:

- you should hold your child's hand when you are walking on the footpath or in a carpark (until they are at least eight) and when crossing the road (until they are at least ten)
- always drop off and pick up your children on the school side of the road
- never call your child across the road
- use a pedestrian crossing where possible
- make sure children use the footpath-side door when getting into and out of the car.

Some safety tips for when you drop off and pick up your child from the school bus or train include:

- hold your child's hand and walk together to the bus stop or train station in the morning
- if you cannot be with your child, organise for another trusted adult to accompany them
- meet your child at the bus stop or train station after school. NEVER wait on the opposite side of the road
- talk with your child about what they should do if you are delayed and cannot meet them as usual
- when children get off the bus, wait on the footpath until the bus has been driven away. Then together choose the safest place to cross the road.

For more information visit the RTA website at [www.rta.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au)

## REMEMBER

Children are more likely to cope successfully with the transition to school if they've had positive experiences away from their home and familiar adults.

Community Services thanks these organisations for their contribution to this fact sheet and invites you to visit their websites for more information.



[www.rta.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au)



[www.det.nsw.edu.au](http://www.det.nsw.edu.au)