

# Countdown to Kindergarten

*You play an important role in helping your child begin school with the self-confidence and positive attitude that will help your child succeed.*

**S**tarting school is a big step. As your child nears kindergarten entry, there are a number of ways you can help to prepare him.

## What you can do ahead of time

During the six months or so before the start of kindergarten, it helps to:

- Visit the school and meet the teacher and principal. Encourage your child to ask questions.
- Visit the kindergarten classroom with your child, preferably while class is in session.
- Talk about the new activities, bus route, and schedule.
- Read books that discuss changes, moves, and kindergarten. Create a puppet show or scrapbook with pictures of the new school. Encourage your child to ask questions. Play pretend kindergarten with your child.
- Attend kindergarten roundup or other orientation activities.
- Have on hand any necessary information about the school your child will be attending: name, address, phone number, web site, principal's name, secretary's name, before-and-after school care
- Try to meet other parents of children who will be starting kindergarten with your child. Set up play dates so your child will get to know some of the children before starting school.
- Ask about appropriate clothing and provide it for your child. Make sure the clothing is comfortable.
- Volunteer in a kindergarten classroom before your child starts there. Notice what is expected of the children.
- Attend Parents as Teachers group meetings, especially those with a kindergarten readiness focus.

## More ways to help

- Suggest ways of making friends and offer suggestions on how to start a conversation or join a group.
- Help your child become organized by arranging a book bag and becoming familiar with school supplies.
- Discuss how to talk to the teacher about getting help with a lesson or using the bathroom.
- If your child will be eating a hot lunch at school, have him carry a tray at a restaurant buffet for practice.

## What you can do as the starting day draws near

The day your child first goes to kindergarten is an important event. Make it a positive experience! While this is a major separation from your child's familiar world of home and family, it also marks his entrance into a new area of friendship, learning, and adventure. Your greatest gift to your child at this time is your loving support and understanding.

If you show enthusiasm toward the school experience and learning, your child is more likely to look forward to it. At the same time, avoid setting up unrealistic expectations or telling your child how he should feel. Say, "There will be a lot of children to play with," not "You'll love playing with all the children." If your child does not feel the way he thinks he should, he may be disappointed.

Here are some things you can do before or on the first day of school:

- Have your child start the same sleep schedule he will be keeping once school starts. Kindergarteners need about 10 hours of sleep

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PARENT HANDOUT

each night.

- Provide a good breakfast for your child. Don't force him to eat if he's not hungry.
- Tuck your phone number and address into your child's backpack.
- Walk or drive the route several times ahead of time so it is familiar to your child.
- Have your child break in new shoes ahead of time.
- If your child is riding a bus, try to line up a partner for him ahead of time.
- Give your child a transitional object, such as a picture, to remind him of you and other family members and pets.
- When your child returns home, avoid interrogating him. Ask open-ended questions such as, "What was the best thing about today?"
- If things don't go as planned on the first day, don't worry about it. You always have the next day.

**Things you can do after school starts**

- Volunteer for as many jobs at the school as possible. Your child will know that school is important to you. You also will get to know your child's teachers and other school personnel. There are many jobs that can be done at home, too.

- Let your child's teacher know when and where you can be reached during the day.
- Try writing short notes as a way to communicate with your child's teacher.
- Do not criticize your child's teacher or school administrators in front of your child. You want him to respect those in authority.
- Routinely review school papers and projects; focus on the positive.
- Give your child free playtime at home. When your child begins school he will spend his day in a more structured environment, so allow more time at home for free play.
- Set up a regular time for homework. Get into the daily habit of turning off the television after dinner and going over your child's schoolwork and homework with him. This tells him that his education is important, both to you and to him.
- Attend parent-teacher conferences.
- Join parent-teacher organizations.
- Participate in fund-raising and community projects.



# Easing Into Kindergarten

*Your child will be going through exciting changes as she starts kindergarten.*

**D**epending on her past experience and her personality, she may adjust quickly and easily or she may take a little longer to get used to things.

## Kindergarten expectations

In general, more time is spent on formal study in kindergarten than in preschool. Your child will be expected to pay attention for longer periods of time, to play cooperatively with others, and to plan ahead. She also will probably be in a larger class than she is used to and will have less attention from the teacher. She may be away from home for more hours. She will be around older children on the bus, at lunch, during recess, and at other times.

If your child is able to adjust to these changes, she will have an easier time making future school adjustments. You may not always be able to tell if she is having difficulty. If you notice changes in her behavior, such as temper tantrums, clinginess, loss of appetite, or complaints of physical discomfort, talk with her kindergarten teacher about it. The teacher may be able to make simple changes in the classroom, give your child extra attention, or offer advice.

## Adjustments for parents

Parents are often surprised that they, too, go through an adjustment period when their child starts kindergarten. They also find that the adjustment, both for them and their child, takes longer than they expected.

As your child enters school, you may feel sadness, worry, fear, excitement, and relief, among other emotions. This is normal. Change is stressful. As your child grows into her role as a student, you will find that you, too, will face new challenges. Your child's teacher and other parents will have expectations of you. Talk about your feelings with your parent educator and with other kindergarten parents, friends, or other adults.

## How to help your child

Your child may need extra support and reassurance during the first few months of school. Spend time having fun together. Show her and tell her that you love her. Cuddle with her and tell funny stories. Read books to your child about the starting of school. Set aside time to talk with her about her feelings and what is going on at school. Tell her how proud you are of her.

Make sure your child has time for free play after she gets home from school, but also set aside time for homework. Turn off the television and go over your child's schoolwork and homework assignments with her. This tells her that her education is important, both to you and to her. Offer help, but don't do her homework for her.

Support the good things your child has done. Look for the successes and share them with other family members. Help make your child's first school experiences positive. You, your child, and your child's school are partners in her education. Remember, you are still her most important teacher!



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# Almost There Activity Page

## Why this activity is important

- By making and reading a book, your child will have the opportunity to practice the kinds of experiences she will meet in kindergarten.
- Your child is able to separate more easily and feel more comfortable about starting kindergarten if she knows what will be expected of her.

## What to use

- Several file folders, cut into 8" x 10" pieces for book pages
- Crayons or markers
- Old magazines containing pictures of children, teachers, toys, and items found in a school
- If possible, a photo of the school where the child will be attending kindergarten (some school districts have Web sites which include photos that can be printed)
- Children's scissors
- Glue, paste, or glue stick
- Wide masking tape
- Children's book about going to school

## What to do

- Make a book with your child about starting kindergarten. Use the materials listed above or others you might have.
- Cut pictures out of magazines or have your child draw scenes she thinks she might see in school.
- Personalize the book by including a picture of your child and the school she will attend. If she goes for a school visit, take pictures of her while she is there to put in the book.
- Bind the pages of the book together with tape.
- Read the book with your child. Have her read the book to someone else by talking about the pictures.

## Continue the learning

Follow your child's lead to decide what to put in her book. Children often pretend or talk about things that concern them about a new situation. When your child makes a page for the book, ask her to tell you about it. Help her prepare for the situations she has included in the book.

Read books about starting kindergarten or going to school. Your local public library can help you find books that will help your child make the transition to kindergarten.