

TRANSITIONS

STARTING SCHOOL

Becoming a school kid is a big, big milestone. It is an exciting time for a family and also a significant transition for all of you. Enjoy the thrills, spills and chill and seek support or guidance if needed.

Model a positive attitude: Be mindful of how you speak about school and what it will be like. Try to balance the exciting and fun parts with the reality that there will be ups and downs.

Avoid pressure: Remind, Remind, Remind your children that Prep or the first year at school is mostly about learning to be a school kid, so it's not a big deal how many letters and numbers they know right now.

Being social: Talk with them about making friends. Role play or have casual chats about how friendships form and some of the social behaviours needed now they are at school. Give them a chance to practice by having play-time with peers before school starts.

Set your own goals: Acknowledge that your routines and your parenting role will also change. Ensure you have enough time and resources to meet your needs and keep you feeling happy at home or work now your child has started at school. It is transition time for parents too!

“You did
what today?”

That’s
amazing!”



TRANSITIONING TO SCHOOL

Maintain a warm and stable home environment:

With so many changes, children need to come home to familiar routines. Being a new schoolkid can be tiring, (mentally and physically) so they need home to be a place to chill and enjoy calm, down-time with their families. For working parents it can be a bit harder, so if possible draw on your extended family or friends to achieve some low-key after-school time (rather than wall-to-wall activities or After School Care every day). A healthy balance or mix is best.

Go back to school: Many schools have a lot of activities and opportunities for parents to participate and connect with both the school and other parents: orientation evenings, school working groups, parenting programs, sports days. Show your children that school is a positive place and you make some community connections too!

Teachers are allies: Teaching, like parenting can be a tough job, except multiplied! Be helpful and understanding in regards to their workloads. If you have issues or requests, respectful and patient communication is best for giving them insight into what works well with your child. Avoid being too critical if possible, but also don't be afraid to speak out if you have real concerns.

Get organised: It is helpful to model positive routines and organisation for your children and all family members, particularly in the first few months when you all might be a bit more tired than usual. Have early dinners, keep to bed time routines on school nights and limit technology. Draw up signs, diagrams or lists – Do this together and set out clothes, books, sports gear or whatever they need the night before. This will really save both of you in the morning! They can own this responsibility of getting themselves ready as they get older.

WHAT TO DO IF THEY COME HOME UPSET

Our own memories and experiences of school can be powerful and may stay with us for a long time. As adults we can all remember what it felt like to be left out of a game, sit alone at lunchtime or not picked by the team. We can all connect with these feelings, so it can be hard for parents to see their children being upset or left-out.

Talk about it: Silence is not always golden in these situations. It is important to ask about and validate their feelings: "That sounds pretty tough". Find out more, but keep in mind that some kids may exaggerate, acknowledge what they say but help them maintain perspective.

Encourage them: Collaborative problem solving is a great way to build up both of your skills and resilience so it is not as hard in the future. Your children will then take these practical life skills that are so useful for tackling problems into their adult lives.

Be positive and constructive: Children will look to you for emotional and practical support. Do this with positive praise and encouragement "Sounds like you handled it really well". Ask if they can see a way forward, "What do you think you could do?" and then offer suggestions (if necessary), "What do you think of this idea..." and then make a plan together, "OK so tell me the plan..."

Next steps: Once you have discussed and worked through a positive plan together you can then move on or shift their focus on to something else. "Now let's build something awesome with Lego".

Follow-up: Make sure you check in with them the next day: "So, I was thinking of you today, how did you go?"

WHAT YOU CAN DO WHEN THEY DON'T WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL

Refusing to go to school is hard all-round. It is understandable when children like being at home and spending time with you, but over the long-term it will have impacts on a whole range of important skills and outcomes for them, educationally, socially and emotionally. So what can you do?

Don't overreact: Be interested in why. They may feel very alone so talk about the support available and the school friends waiting to see them.

Be firm and keep them busy: "We need to go now", is a way of demonstrating the importance of school and keeping to routines. The old distraction trick can be useful, for example, "Help me decide what's for dinner before we leave", put on music or sing to them or make them laugh as you get ready at home or while driving to school. Try not to focus on it in the morning. It is better to have these discussions after school. In your discussions with them it is important not to offer sympathy. YES to understanding and support, but saying things like: "Oh you poor thing" is unhelpful. Although this may sound good at first, in the long run it can buy into or entrench their anxiety further and make it harder ultimately to return to school.

Ongoing school refusal is really difficult for some parents to manage, so it's OK to seek advice and guidance and speak to the teacher or wellbeing officer or seek support from a counsellor or parent educator if it's ongoing.