

Getting ready for kindergarten

Schools across the country are getting ready to once again open their doors and welcome new and returning students. The newest crop of kindergarteners will be among the fresh faces roaming the hallways and classrooms, and parents can take steps to make this transition go more smoothly.

Although many children attend preschool, kindergarten typically marks a child's initial foray into formal education. It can be a time of wonder, new experiences and rapid educational growth. Kindergarten also can stimulate nerves and fears about the unexpected. Preparing children for kindergarten requires a little finesse to make this significant milestone in a kid's life that much more special.

- Speak often about kindergarten. Talking openly and excitedly about kindergarten is one way to spur a child's interest in school. As the first day of school approaches, bring it up in conversation and see how your youngster feels about kindergarten. Some children are anxious to begin this new chapter in their lives, while others are daunted by the prospect of starting school. Understanding how your child feels about kindergarten can help you more effectively deal with any apprehension he or she might have.

- Schedule a tour. Some schools have programs in place to introduce incoming kindergarteners to the school and the curriculum. For others, you may have to request a visit to the school. Such visits can be helpful, especially if your child does not have an older sibling already in the school and is completely unfamiliar with the building. Sometimes just being able to see what the school and kindergarten classroom looks like is enough to assuage fears.

- Start adjusting kids' schedules. Summer vacation and pre-kindergarten life may be about retiring to bed late and waking up much later than the start of a typical school day. But such schedules are no longer realistic once kids begin school. Help kindergarteners-to-be acclimate to their new schedules by gradually changing their bed times and wake times in the weeks leading up to the first day of school. Five-year-olds need between 10 and 12 hours of sleep each night.

- Let kids choose some school supplies. Encourage youngsters to join you as you shop for school supplies, which may excite kids about school and help them feel more actively involved. That new backpack or folder your child picked out can be a source of pride and a security blanket for the first few days of school.

- Encourage kids' independence. A kindergarten teacher will be supportive and nurturing but will not be a substitute parent for the class. Children should be able to do certain things for themselves when entering kindergarten. Taking their jackets on and off, packing up their belongings, cleaning up toys and other supplies and following directions are just a few things kids should be able to do on their own upon entering kindergarten. It may be tempting to do everything for your preschooler, but kids who are too dependent may struggle to acclimate to kindergarten.

- Encourage kids to spend time with their peers. Your child may benefit from spending time with other kids their age and sharing their expectations of kindergarten. Such dialogue can remove some of the unknown of starting school.

- Don't pressure kids at the last minute. There is no way to cram when preparing for your kindergartener's first day of school. Rushing through flash cards or quizzing kids on the alphabet may just make them nervous about the start of school.

- Make note of the similarities between preschool and kindergarten. Kindergarten may not be so different from

preschool, and such familiarity can make the transition that much easier for youngsters. Some preschools mirror the curriculum of the local elementary school district, introducing students to the types of lessons they eventually will learn in kindergarten. Make note of these similarities in an effort to calm any jitters kids may have about starting school.



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