

several days before classes began. The children got to know the new school building and met their teachers as they would old family friends. They met their future schoolmates, too, and discovered them to be not frightening, but exciting.

"Most of these children," says the teacher, "took the first awkward days of school in stride. The pity is that only half the parents troubled to take advantage of this help for their children."

Each year this teacher and thousands of others contend with the same parental apathy. They face scrubbed little faces, fresh clothes, shiny pencil boxes—and a sea of children totally unequipped emotionally for the transition from home to school.

Janie, stiff and wet-eyed in the corner, has been told by her mother that she "must be a big girl now." Yet, up to this moment Mother has never let Janie even button her own clothes. And Matthew, restless in his front-row seat, was instructed by his mother, "Be nice now." But why should he? At home he was never required to observe even the rudiments of politeness or respect.

There are others, too, whose parents have forgotten that education begins at birth and that learning should be regarded as a privilege, not a terror. These children will find first grade a misery, and probably all the grades that follow.

But it doesn't have to be that way. Hazel F. Gabbard of the U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare points out that the normal child will have no difficulty in school if he already is used to learning—as he should be. But home learning, she adds, no longer means memorizing the ABCs or counting up to 10. It is the ability to get on with others socially, adjust to youthful emotional problems, and take an exploratory interest in the world around us.

The parent develops these basics of education; the teacher only polishes them. Rather than shelter the preschool child, for example, parents might encourage his social growth by holding parties or opening the basement for rainy-day "get-togethers." A classroom, no matter how crowded, will hold no fear for the child of such parents.

By age five or six, a youngster also should feel confident enough to meet the outside world without clinging to Mom and Pop. Visiting overnight with playmates or spending a week end with a favorite aunt and uncle will dispel the strangeness of those first school hours far from home.

It's up to parents, too, to instill an appreciation for the wide horizons opened by education. They can whet a child's appetite for learning through trips to the airport, farm, and museum. For the youngster who has seen a zoo, the primer tale about elephants is not a collection of dry words but a stimulating recollection of an exciting moment in the child's life.

Certainly the first grader should be able to dress and undress, pick up after himself, and take care of toilet needs. Many can't, however, and they find themselves helpless in a group that can be cruel to the helpless.

Experts remind parents that school is active participation, not passive acceptance. Even

this is impossible for some untrained children. Miss Gabbard cites the case of a four-year-old girl who would plead, "Let me help you, Mother." Mother was too busy to let her child "help," however, and the result was a school child who was always on the sidelines, unable to perform ordinary tasks and without confidence to try them.

Comes September and many parents realize they've failed to prepare Junior and Sis for school. It's too late for a complete remedy, but at least some groundwork can be laid for a happy school life.

The time has come, for instance, to drop the remnants of baby talk once and for all. Now begins a daily routine of life geared to make the school schedule more understandable. Family discussions begin to include school and teachers in terms that make learning the adventure it is—but parents should avoid making school sound like a picnic; teachers have enough disciplinary problems already.

School authorities recommend that parents walk their children to school and back home several times before classes begin. The youngster thus learns the route and the safety rules; equally important, he can be left on his own more quickly. This is a good time to meet the school staff, too, and learn how modern schools operate and what teachers expect from the home. Most parents will be surprised at the changes in education since their own school days.

For one thing, the teacher hopes each parent will take an interest in what happens to his or her child during his school day. Helping him with reading and other studies may be helpful in some cases, but every parent should take time to notice his youngster's achievements and express pride in his continuing efforts.

As for failures—well, they happen to everybody, and the remedy is always the same: kind encouragement. Teachers stress that every child is an individual. He will develop at his own pace, and comparing him with other youngsters helps nobody.

Even the right clothing can help the child in those first days. Simple, sturdy togs are the most practical, and they won't cause run-ins with other children. Clothing should have large buttons and buttonholes, allow freedom for active play, and not bind legs, arms, or waist. In addition, clothes should be labeled for identification and easily managed for toilet habits.

Clothing problems can be adjusted overnight, but not those that stem from neglected preschool training. Yet parents who wake one bright September morn to the realization their children are ill-equipped for school life still can correct the shortcoming.

As Miss Gabbard says, "Each age brings different phases of growth and requires understanding adults to help a child over the bumps. As children grow, parents also grow in planning for their offspring."

The guidance lacking in early years often can be adapted to school needs with the teacher's help. With more understanding and interest at home, the child who falters will catch up and prove what teachers mean when they say a child's success is really the parents' success.

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