

Starting School

Starting life in 'big school' can be both a frightening and exciting experience for young children but there are ways in which parents can help make the transition as smooth as possible.

As most ACT children have attended some form of pre school preparation, such as a child care centre or preschool, basic skills such as: listening to instructions, group interaction, independence, discipline and co-operation are already, somewhat, established. To further facilitate the pre school transition, most centres and preschools introduce their students to their local school through excursions.

However, actually attending school is very different to visiting and many concerns can arise in children's minds.

When your child starts school, it is a good idea to ask daily about his or her experiences throughout the day such as: with whom s/he played with, what they did in the classroom, what the teacher spoke about, what stories were read and so on. As a result, your child will be able to reflect on his or her day and put things clearly into perspective and you will soon know if any problems are arising.

If you can see a potential social problem manifesting, talk about it. Rather than giving instructions on how to deal with a problem, let your child help with the solution - give options and let your child choose a course of action. It is better for a child to have the skill to find a solution than to worry. If the problem is a physical one such as not being able to use the play equipment or not being able to kick, catch, climb, bounce or whatever – go to the park and have some fun and let your child practice. By creating a safe, supportive environment where your child is not being judged by others s/he will be more relaxed and be able to attempt and succeed in doing things much more easily.

Another way of helping with social and physical limitations is by having friends come over and play, this is especially important if the child has no brothers or sisters to learn from. When a friend does come over, make them feel welcome, offer nice treats and perhaps take them to the park. It is a good idea not to let younger siblings interfere whilst there is a visitor, young children need some of their own 'space' with their friend. Having a younger, or even older sibling, interrupt them may cause undue aggravation and frustration in the child.

Academic support is also important. There are many ways parents can support a child starting school, but three of the most simple ways are by assisting them in reading, writing and maths. It doesn't have to be an arduous task, basically, if it's not fun for you it can be pretty much assured it won't be for your child. Read interesting stories to your child and listen and support your child's attempts in reading. Create reading experiences in his or her world such as bringing their attention to signs and labels on favourite food, toys and television programs. Help your child become familiar with numbers through the price of items, pocket money and doing calculations with fingers. Use your child's world as a learning experience.

Although most academic learning is experienced in the classroom, take your child to green spaces – you can never learn enough from nature. Watch ant trails (learn organisational skills, cooperation, counting), spy on the ways of cats and dogs

(balance, poise, intent, concentration), flowers and trees (seasons, colours, smells, textures). There is nothing in nature that your child could not learn from. Respect and appreciation for nature will naturally extend to all aspects of their lives.

Seeing is believing. If your child sees that you have an interest in their school life they will feel a sense of importance and will naturally try to do well. Ways in which you can display this interest is by becoming involved at school either by helping out in the classroom with such things as reading, writing, computers or craft or by becoming a canteen volunteer, a class parent representative or a number of other ways parents can help – just ask the teacher.

Finally, your child's most important teacher and role model is you. If your child sees you reading, writing, having fun and accepting and enjoying life you will probably find that they will too. Set good examples, don't preach and be a good friend and listener.

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