



Y Parenting Tips

Is my Child Ready for 'Big School?'

Starting school can be a very stressful event—for parents, children and siblings. For the child this can be exciting... the feel of the new school shoes and uniform, routines such as recess ('little lunch'), new friends, lessons and assembly. It can also be quite overwhelming, especially for children without an older brother or sister to help them find their way.

As the parent of a preschooler you will probably have many questions concerning:

- your child's readiness for school
- the best schooling option for you and your child
- the enrolment process
- what your child will be learning
- who to talk to regarding problems or concerns
- how you can encourage your child's learning.

How do I know if my child is ready?

This can be a difficult thing to recognise. All children develop at different rates—some will settle quickly into school, while others will take time to adjust. There is the emotional as well as the ability level to consider, so don't be tempted to compare older siblings with your preschooler. However by the age of five, most children:

- can identify basic colours and shapes
- have an idea about size in relation to other objects—eg which is taller or longer
- understand basic positions—eg beside, behind, on top of, underneath, next to

- are aware of blocks of time—eg after lunch, tonight—even if they can't tell time
- understand basic number concepts of counting and size, shapes
- can relate a story or an event that has happened to them
- have reasonable levels of impulse control—taking turns, controlling aggression, following routines
- cope with normal stress and anxiety, and new situations and events
- show empathy for others—they understand how another person is feeling
- participate in cooperative activities
- can resolve disagreements in non-aggressive ways, with minimal adult assistance
- can control a pencil and use scissors
- have good hand-eye coordination—eg to catch, kick and throw a ball, open buttons and zips, tie laces, do up buckles
- can concentrate for a minimum 30 minutes on a given task
- understand what written words are—but not necessarily to be able to read
- recognise their own name when written, and be able to write it
- are naturally curious and like finding out about things
- know his/her name, address and telephone number, and parents' place of employment well enough to repeat them

- know the safest way to and from school.

Studies have shown that children with these skills are more likely to do well at school—both socially and in their ability to learn.

How do I know what school is right for me and my child?

Before your child starts school, you'll need to decide:

- on public or private education, and then which school meets your requirements and expectations—this is also subject to the school's selection criteria (zoning requirements for public schools and any religious ones for private schools)
- if your child requires any additional support to attend school and how they can get it.

Factors in your decision could include:

- the curriculum (what the children will be learning) and what other activities the school offers—eg sport activities or science
- the philosophy of the school
- how they will travel to and from school (bus timetables and routes)
- school fees and what school uniforms are required
- before and after school care, if required.

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How do I enrol my child in school?

A student is considered to be enrolled when he or she is placed on the admission register of a school (students should only be enrolled in one school at a time). Children are entitled to enrolment in the government school within the intake area (zone) where they live, however parents may seek enrolment at the school of their choice. Schools are required to have a written policy stating on what grounds 'non-local' enrolments will be accepted—usually involving the availability of staff and classrooms.

There are particular requirements for enrolment in some schools and the decision on acceptance will depend on a number of factors, including a student's educational needs, the expressed desires of parents and caregivers, location, and whether the school can provide the level of support services required generally.

Will my child be safe and well cared for?

Schools have a duty of care to ensure that your child is safe, and that each person employed at the school has the right qualifications for their position, and has undergone Criminal History Checks to ensure they are 'fit and proper persons' to be working with children. This includes teachers, administrative staff, teacher's aides, maintenance staff and people working in the canteen. Children are supervised at all times they are on school premises during set school hours, and those catching buses home are supervised until the last bus leaves.

If I have a problem or concern about my child at school, who do I talk to?

This depends on the nature of your concern. If it is about your child's schoolwork then you should first speak with the teacher, who might refer you on to the Principal or School Counsellor.

If you have a serious concern about something happening (or not happening) in the school, then speak to the Principal. You can ask that a representative be there with you for support, or you can request additional people attend the meeting (such as School Counsellor).

The Department of Education and Training (DET) has policies for resolving grievances and complaints in public schools. You can talk with someone from DET, or (if a Catholic school) someone such as the Director of the diocese's Education Office.

How can I encourage my child to be an active learner?

You can help your child to learn and enjoy school by:

- teaching them to dress, tie their shoes, and put on a raincoat
- encouraging them by praising their efforts and discussing work brought home
- reading stories to them and supervising their TV watching
- allowing them to spend some time away from home so that they are comfortable away from their parents

- give them simple tasks to complete, and the freedom to make mistakes and learn from them
- talking to them about things you are doing—eg cooking—and encouraging them to eg read stories, draw, write their name, sing or listening to music.

How can I become more involved in the school?

Whatever school you choose, there will be lots of ways you can contribute—and help your children settle into the school routine. You are encouraged to attend scheduled parent/teacher interviews and class meetings, take part in courses conducted for parents—eg Parents as Tutors—or you can volunteer to help with:

- canteen duties
- library—eg covering books, reading/literacy programs
- fundraising activities
- reading/listening programs
- excursions
- social functions—eg fete, disco—and sports carnivals
- decision making through the Parents' & Citizens' Association
- programs such as the YWCA's Kids Cafe breakfast program
- working bees.

Disclaimer

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