

www.studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/parents/starting-school/

Help your child prepare for school

Starting school is one of the most important experiences in a child's life. For you, as a parent or carer, this brings an opportunity to strengthen your relationship with your child and advocate for their needs in the new context of school.

You know your child's strengths and preferences and how best to support them. Think about how your child might respond to this change, plan your actions in advance, and work with them to make the move to school a positive experience.

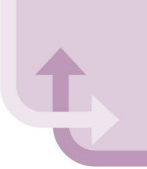
Schools are places for both academic and social learning. In the early years of schooling, your child will learn foundational skills and gain knowledge across a range of new subjects. They will also discover new interests and strengths. You can help your child to approach this experience with interest and curiosity.

The social learning your child will learn at school is also important. Your child will enter a social environment that has different expectations. They will learn and use new ways to interact with teachers and peers in different situations. They will develop relationships and friendships with adults and their peers.



Meeting with your child's teacher in advance will ensure your child has the best start to school.

The move to school is different for every child. It is important to allow plenty of time for preparation. To ensure a smooth transition, it is essential to meet the school beforehand. Organising important information about your child and communicating this with school staff early in the transition process will help make the experience positive. For suggestions on sharing information with your child's teacher, go to **Help your school understand your child's needs** and **Talking to your child's teacher** topics.



Once the school year starts, it may take several weeks before your child feels comfortable in the new setting. Having positive interactions and building rewarding social relationships with their teacher and peers will help them gain self-confidence and develop a positive attitude towards learning.

With a clear understanding of the academic and social experiences in the new school, you can plan for any support your child may need. Having different family members present for some of the following activities could help your child feel embraced by the family’s support and enthusiasm for this major change.

Some children may require additional support or work their way up to full-time attendance.

What new experiences does primary school present?

School is a very different environment to what families might have experienced before. There’s often less personal contact with the classroom teacher or school personnel than they might have had when their child has been in childcare or kindy. So that’s a big change and a big shift in thinking often for families around the shift in communication. There’s not necessarily that personal handover of your child.

— Professor Beth Siggers, School of Early Childhood and Inclusive Education, Queensland University of Technology

Select each title to view the information in the table below.

<p>Environmental experience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bigger school grounds with more students across a range of ages • New spaces, playgrounds and boundaries • Different locations for some activities, for example, school library, music room, outdoor education, school canteens, toilets, drink fountains • Noisier, busier spaces (particularly during breaks and before and after school)
<p>Academic learning experience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning new academic skills • New teachers and classes with different students • More instructions and feedback from the teacher • New types of learning materials for particular activities • Frequent transitions between activities • Teaching assistants may not be in the classroom all the time • Planned and unplanned teacher absences • More structured learning experiences in class (and typically less play-based free time) • Participation in activities that take a little longer • Requirement to finish classroom tasks on time • Expectation to respond to questions in front of everyone • Greater use of digital technologies for learning
<p>Social learning experience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning new social behaviours through observation • Expectation to participate in turn-taking games more often • Expectation to follow peer behaviours such as sharing resources • Requirement to follow whole-class routines • Requirement to work in pairs or small groups • Requirement to follow small-group activity rules

- Independent self-care skills (such as toilet use, eating, grooming)
- Expectation to receive help and help others
- Need to request a break or ask for help independently

Using social stories to prepare your child for school

The idea of social stories was created in the USA by [Carol Gray](#). Social stories help children understand new situations they will enter. They help them to understand what other people think and feel when their behaviour is what is expected.

Social stories are a useful tool found to be effective for helping young learners adapt to changes in their routine and adapt their behaviours to new experiences. Social stories present information in a respectful and meaningful way for the child to help them understand aspects of the new physical and social educational settings.

Social stories are usually quite short and are made individually for each child, using words and pictures and text that are about them and their experiences. They are never used as a consequence for misbehaviour.

To write a social story you will need detailed information from about the situation you are preparing for. Writing it may take some practice.

Social stories are valuable because they:

- make a new situation more predictable
- make familiar a routine that your child has not encountered before
- provide information in clear steps, so that your child knows what to expect and how they can act, which supports them to try new things
- can help develop skills by explicitly showing and explaining the tasks or actions your child can do
- reduce your child's anxiety by outlining a clear, set routine.

Create a social story

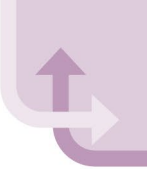
Creating a personalised social story is a great way to talk about starting school with your child. The stories are proactive tools designed to reduce transition anxiety and help your child build essential knowledge for the new school. They can help children use this knowledge to exercise more control about what is happening when they are at school.

The stories can describe the key places, people and activities your child will encounter in their typical school day, and why they are important. A social story can also explain some of the important social expectations and the unwritten rules and patterns of behaviour expected of them while at school.

[Make a social story](#) [PDF] provides some hints for creating your own stories.

You can make an individualised social story on any topic by creating a booklet, a slide presentation or by downloading and using this blank.

Video: Using social stories to help your child prepare for school



Social story: Getting Ready for School in the Morning

This social story is called [Getting ready for school in the morning](#) [PDF]. The aim of this story is to help your child understand what their morning routine will look like on a typical school day, and prepare them for this routine. This can reduce your child's anxiety and help make school mornings run smoothly. It is supported with [discussion notes](#) [PDF] to help you get the most out of the story.

The story starts with waking up for the day and includes the steps involved in getting ready, such as having breakfast, getting dressed, getting to school and saying goodbye to family.

Want to personalise this story with your own pictures? Download the [text only version](#) [PDF] and add photographs or drawings of your own to illustrate it.