

Getting Your Child Ready for Pre-K or Kindergarten

For many kids, going to school is a big transition: being in a structured environment, learning new skills and meeting new faces. While you can't prepare your child for everything, here are some things you can do to help set them up for success.

Managing feelings

Talk openly about feelings. Encourage your child to name and express how they are feeling regularly, so that it becomes normal and familiar. You can use characters in books or charts with feeling faces to help your child start to identify and express feelings.

Actively listen and validate their feelings. If your child feels they have your full attention, they are more likely to open up to you. Put away any distractions and let them know it's OK and normal to feel anything they feel (even if you feel differently).

Focus on the positive. Help your child feel a little excitement about starting school by creating a new back-to-school tradition or going to pick out supplies together.

Help your child manage their feelings, not avoid them. Coping skills help us manage our feelings and handle stress. Whether it's taking deep breaths, drawing, listening to music, or talking to someone, help your child practice lots of ways they can manage their feelings.



It's difficult to learn new things when we are anxious, tired, distracted or upset. Be sure to teach and practice new coping skills when everyone is calm.

Advocating for your child

- ✓ Check in with your child's teacher regularly, and be open and honest about your child's strengths and needs.
- ✓ Let the staff know if your child is facing challenges outside of school and that your child may need extra support throughout the day.

Preparing for school

Help your child feel more independent, confident and prepared by:

- Attending the "meet the teacher night" or visiting the school before the first day.
- Driving the bus route or drop-off route with your child before the first day and talking about what they can expect.
- Encouraging your child to practice with any items or materials they will be using on their own (e.g., lunch containers, backpacks, jacket zippers, etc.).
- Meeting up with other kids that will be attending your child's school, so they know someone on the first day. These meet-ups can also help improve communication and social skills, such as sharing and taking turns.
- Creating, or maintaining, daily bedtime and morning routines to help keep things predictable and to create a sense of comfort and security.

Practicing healthy habits

Practicing healthy habits as a family helps support your child’s mind and body while positively impacting their mood, focus and behavior.

Nutrition: Children need to fuel their bodies to fuel their minds. Encourage your child to drink water, and eat three meals and two to three snacks at consistent times each day.

Sleep: Turn off digital screens and electronic devices at least one hour before bedtime, and keep devices out of the bedroom to get quality rest. Your child may be adjusting to a longer day than they are used to, so they will need all the rest they can get!

Activity: All kids need time to be active, play and have fun. Encourage your child to incorporate movement into the day by taking short walks, stretching, or putting on music and dancing.



Help everyone stay organized by hanging up a family calendar with school events, upcoming projects and family fun time.

Communicating with your child

Strategy	Try saying	Instead of
Normalize and validate your child’s feelings.	“It’s normal to feel nervous. I understand.”	“It will be fine. There’s nothing to worry about.”
Keep your cool. Share your calm, not your worry.	“Are you worried you won’t know anyone? I was always so nervous on the first day.”	“I know you’ve been looking forward to this. I can’t wait to hear about your day.”
Help your child work through their feelings, not avoid them.	“Let’s take some deep breaths to help you feel better.”	“Don’t cry! You are going to have so much fun.”



4- to 5-year-olds typically need 10 to 13 hours of sleep in a 24-hour period.

6-year-olds typically need 9 to 12 hours of sleep in a 24-hour period.