



# Tips for Parents: Starting School

***Beyond buying new lunch boxes, back packs, and school clothes, what can parents do to make sure their children start the school year off on the right foot? The answer is simple—and cheap.***

## **A great opportunity**

There are many fun things that parents can do to get their kids excited about starting back to school. Most of them involve money: buying the latest school supplies, or having a back-to-school party for friends.

But sometimes we get so caught up with new notebooks, special stickers, or just the right clothes—that we miss the point.

The start of the school years gives every child (and parents) a great opportunity for a new beginning, a fresh start, a clean slate.

## **Learning Resolutions**

Many of us make New Year's resolutions on the first day of the new calendar year. Why not have your family make learning resolutions on the first day of the new school year?

A child, for example, could resolve to: spend at least 15 minutes each day reading just for the fun of it, write down all homework assignments, or read and talk about a story in the newspaper once a week.

Parents, on the other hand, could set goals to: ask about and look at their children's homework each day, check in with the teacher once a month, or take the family to the public library on a regular basis.

When you help children make learning resolutions, you are really helping them set goals. Being able to set and accomplish goals often increases self-esteem and the probability of academic success.

## **When your child starts school<sup>1</sup>**

- Recognize that the day your child first goes off to school is an important event. It is the first major separation from the secure and familiar world of home and family, and it marks entrance into a new universe of friendship, learning, and adventure—a world that

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *Plain Talk Series*, Ruth Kay (Editor), U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services. Reprinting permission not necessary.

parents can never again entirely share. Your greatest gift to your child at this time is your loving support and understanding.

- Remember that learning to like school and liking to learn are closely related. Your child's first school experience can contribute to a good or bad attitude toward school in the years ahead.
- Prepare your child for the new school experience by explaining what to expect and answering all questions honestly. A child may be anxious, and needs to know details such as how long they will be at school, in order to handle the stress involved.
- Convey a positive attitude about school. If parents show enthusiasm for what the school experience can mean, the child is more likely to look forward to it.
- Make transportation plans clear to the child. Introduce the walking route, or identify what the school bus will look like. Have older children watch out for the younger ones. If the child cries, try not to over-react; in most cases the tears will soon disappear.
- Create a normal routine atmosphere at home the first few days of school. Take an active interest in what your child tells you about school. Be a good listener, allowing time to talk about school and the people there.
- Give your child free playtime at home. Now that your child spends more time in a structured school environment, you should allow more free time at home for play.
- Get to know your child's teacher. Join the PTA, or volunteer in your child's classroom.
- Praise your child for the good things he/she has done. A pat on the back for the right answers can go a long way. Too often we tend to focus on poor performance and behavior.
- Treat going to school as part of the normal course of events, something that is expected of your child and accepted by you. A calm, matter-of-fact, positive attitude is your goal.
- Help your child cope with occasional frustrations and disappointments at school.

For more information:

**Web link:**

US Department of Education "Questions Parents Ask About Schools"

<http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/questions/questions.pdf>

Learning Partners "Get Ready for School!"

[http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/cic\\_text/family/lpartner/get.htm](http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/cic_text/family/lpartner/get.htm)

U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement, "Helping Your Child Succeed in School":

[http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/cic\\_text/family/succeed/index.html](http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/cic_text/family/succeed/index.html)

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