

Your child's first year at school:

A book for parents



Jenni Connor and Pam Linke

The publication of this book is an exciting joint initiative by Early Childhood Australia and the Australian Primary Principals Association to support parents and schools in making the first year of school a successful and happy one for young children.



Early Childhood Australia

A voice for young children

Early Childhood Australia

is the peak non-profit, non-government early childhood advocacy organisation. It actively promotes the provision of high-quality services for all young children from birth to eight years and their families, and supports the important role of parents.

Early Childhood Australia works with government, early childhood professionals, parents, other carers of young children, and various lobby groups to secure the best range of options and outcomes for children as they grow and develop.



Australian Primary Principals Association

Australian Primary Principals Association (APPAA)

is the national professional association for primary school principals.

APPAA represents state/territory government, Catholic and independent primary school principals across the nation, with approximately 7,200 members.

The purpose for APPAA is to be the national voice for all primary school principals.

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ISBN10 1-921162-28-7

ISBN13 978-1-921162-28-2

Printed by Paragon Printers, Canberra 2011

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Introduction

Your child's first year at school: A book for parents

If you are an adult caring for a child who is starting full-time school, this book is for you. It is to help you support your child to have a happy, positive and satisfying beginning to the great adventure of the school years.

This book focuses on questions, issues and topics that commonly arise as a child takes this first big step into 'the world of school'. There is information about practical matters such as clothing, excursions and homework; as well as deeper issues such as development, emotions and behaviour, and young children's learning.

You will notice that some information is repeated in different sections. This is because aspects of your young child's life interact and affect one another. If you find things repeated it is probably because they are important.

The term 'parent' is intended to include all caring adults who have primary responsibility for young children in the great diversity of family structures in our society.

As school policies vary across Australia, you will need to check with your child's school about the details of the particular rules, routines and procedures.

Chapter 1

Your child: Starting school

When children begin school, in some ways, they are moving away from the world of parent and family and into the world of children. It is a big step on the journey towards growing up, and most children look forward to it.

They are keen to make new friends, learn new things and feel like 'a grown-up school person'.

In the process, there will be many wonderful experiences for children to enjoy and share with their parents. At the same time, all of this can be stressful for both children and parents if they are not sufficiently prepared for the changes, or if the real experience is 'a bit of a let down'.

“ They may expect to be immediately popular and accepted ... ”

Some children, for example, expect to be able to read and write and 'do sums' by the end of the first day. They may expect to be immediately popular and accepted into games and friendship groups. Parents may need to focus on the positive experiences and explain to children that learning new skills and making friends takes time.

Before going to school children may have been at preschool, in child care or at home, but primary school is a very different place. In their first year, they will be among the youngest and smallest in a relatively large group of 'school children'. Other children may seem like confident, knowing strangers. Even children who have been at school a year or two look like 'big kids' to a five-year-old. The newcomers need help from parents and teachers to ensure that their first year is an enjoyable and rewarding experience that sets the scene for future successful schooling.

The first year at school is often a new step for you as a parent, especially if this is your first or last child starting school. You might not have been into a school for quite a while. This may be particularly true for grandparents who are raising grandchildren. Education may have changed a lot since your own school experience, so it's wise to talk with the teacher and some other parents to find out what they do in schools now. If you have any unhappy school memories, try to put them behind you because children pick up on their parents' feelings and it affects their own attitude towards school. It's very important that you and the school can work well together to give your child the best start.



Children with special needs

Schools across Australia operate under different policies about educational provision for children with special needs, so you may need to check with the district or central office of the Department of Education before selecting a school for your child.

Children who have special and/or additional needs will require particular support to enable them to fully participate in the school experience. If you have a child with a disability, impairment or learning delay you should contact the school you have chosen well before the start of the school year. This will enable everyone concerned to prepare to meet your child's particular needs and to plan, as necessary, for their smooth inclusion into the learning program. For example, you may need to ensure that there is wheelchair access to toilets, classrooms and other facilities; your child may require a Braille reader if they have a vision impairment; if their first language isn't English, they might be entitled to language teaching and interpreter services; or your child might be gifted and benefit from extension and enrichment activities.

Children who have special and/or additional needs will require particular support to enable them to fully participate in the school experience.

Some children who have different needs find transitions such as those from home to school difficult and they require sensitive support from all of the adults involved in order to thrive in the new environment.

Some parents have found it helpful to explain to the class about a child's disability or difference. This helps the other children to understand and act sensitively. Talk with the school and the child's teacher about whether they think it's a good idea and whether you or they will meet the class and answer questions. Some parents have also prepared a little 'biography' with their child, describing for other children and parents about what the child likes and can do.

Parents provide a safe base

Your child's relationship with you will be more important than ever as they begin this big, new 'adventure'. Parents are the safe base from which children can move out to explore the world, to learn and grow and become socially confident, responsible young people.

Your child will want to share with you their new friendships and things they have learnt. At times, they will also need your understanding and comfort—it's like that for all of us throughout life. We want to tell the people we are close to about the exciting and good things that happen, and we depend on them to listen and reassure us when something goes wrong.

Having a safe place to come back to, where people understand and support them, gives children the confidence to try new things and the courage to have another go if they don't at first succeed. Providing a relaxing time after school and being ready to listen and support without asking too many questions will help children to grow strong, emotionally.

“ Parents are the safe base from which children can move out to explore the world, to learn and grow and become socially confident, responsible young people. ”



Supporting independence

We want our children to grow into confident people who can do things for themselves. It's going to be essential for a happy and fulfilling life. At school, often for the first time, children are expected to be independent in new ways such as looking after their clothes and belongings, following precise instructions and making decisions:

- ★ 'Have I got my sunscreen and sunhat ready for outdoors time?'
- * 'Which of these books, games, puzzles or activities will I choose?'
- ★ 'What do I do for a partner in games if my best friend is away?'

However, we can't expect children to have the skills and confidence to be independent straightaway. As with other changes, we need to prepare children for what will happen. We can talk to them about what to expect at school and explain the similarities with going to preschool, child care or Grandma's; we can give them practice at making choices and decisions at home. Packing and unpacking their school bag (usually a backpack), for example, lets children practise some of the skills they'll need at school.



Parents also support children in feeling happy and confident at school by taking steps such as:

- * Make sure the clothes that are worn to school are easy to put on and take off, and that lunches and snacks are easy to unwrap.
- ★ Use shoes with Velcro fasteners until your child can manage more complicated fastenings—learning to tie shoelaces is, in fact, a high-level cognitive skill!
- * Label everything—including shoes and socks—for the first weeks. It's amazing how everyone's clothes look the same when children have changed for games, or taken socks off when it became hot.
- ★ Put an extra pair of undies and socks in a plastic bag; accidents do happen and it reassures children to know they have 'back-up supplies' of their own things and the wet undies can go home in the plastic bag.
- * Expect that children may be tired in the first weeks at school, even if they have been used to care situations. Provide a cuddle, a drink, a snack and some quiet time when they first arrive home.
- ★ Make sure children have sufficient sleep—add an afternoon nap at weekends if your child seems over-tired.
- * Ask about their school day, but expect that you might get a shrug, or an off-hand reply; learn to ask questions that require some elaboration, such as: 'What was your favourite thing about school today?', 'Tell me about your drawing?'
- ★ If your child has special needs, keep in touch with the teacher and the networks of advisory services to access resources to help the child operate as independently as possible.

Teachers in the early years are very sensitive to young children and their needs and will offer help and guidance. However, the more everyday, safe tasks children can manage for themselves, the more they'll feel in control.





Early Childhood Resources for Parents



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children



Everyday learning about screentime and digital technologies

This book teaches you about understanding and providing balance in your children's lives between screen time and other important activities.

Authors: Susan Edwards, Michael Henderson and Moska Mirkhil. 28 pages.

Price: \$14.95



Everyday learning about getting your buttons pushed

This book shows you how to defuse buttons so you can be the caring, nurturing parent you always expected to be. It is about understanding what happens to you in the parent-child conflict, and provides advice on how to change your reactions so they stop interfering with your parenting.

Author: Bonnie Harris. 28 pages.

Price: \$14.95



Everyday learning about managing change

Life is full of changes – big and small, significant and insignificant. How we approach and cope with changes depends, to a large extent, on the experiences of our early years. The foundation of confidence and willingness to try things are built right from the start.

Author: Pam Linke. 28 pages.

Price: \$14.95



Everyday learning about getting along with others

Getting along with others is one of life's essential skills. Children develop these skills through living and interacting with their family and community.

Authors: Lyn Bower and Will Jones. 28 pages.

Price: \$14.95



Everyday learning about being together in the garden

It is important for children's development to create early childhood environments that encourage and support their imagination, creativity and sense of wonder.

Author: Lyn Bower. 28 pages.

Price: \$14.95

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ABN: 44 950 767 752



A good first year at school lasts a lifetime



As a parent whose child is starting school, there are many ways to support your child in having a happy and satisfying beginning to their great adventure of the school years.

Experienced parenting experts and educators Jenni Connor and Pam Linke have combined to provide this comprehensive guidebook. Their real-world advice and positive approach will prove valuable for all parents as they seek to reinforce their child's new experiences of learning, and build a partnership with the school.

Your child's first year at school: A book for parents will assist you in supporting your child throughout one of the most important years of their life.

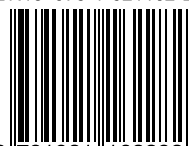


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ISBN10 1-921162-28-7
ISBN13 978-1-921162-28-2



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