

School readiness

The idea of transitioning to school fills children and parents with a range of emotions. Some experience excitement as children enter their next stage of their lives while others fear or become overwhelmed by the unknown. The safe harbour of child care environments is stripped away to enter the world of academia, a transition that some children have been champing at the bit to do for months, while others aren't quite ready to dip more than their toes into. For a parent, the idea of being able to best support children is always at the forefront of their mind. What can I say to my child to make the transition easier? What can I do to help them settle in?

Making connections

Prior to leaving early childhood environments, benefits can be found by forming links with the school. Simultaneously, advantages can be found by continuing to maintain a good working relationship with children's early childhood teachers, educators and other staff who know them and their children well. Early childhood professionals' expertise and knowledge of childhood development, and their combined insight into how children function in educational environments can help to identify children's strengths and ongoing needs.

Being able to harness and gather such knowledge benefits the child in multiple ways. Firstly, such knowledge enables parents and educators to develop and implement plans that are designed to support children to overcome any lingering behavioural, confidence or developmental hurdles they haven't quite cleared. Secondly, educators' knowledge of past children's transitioning stories can help normalise the cyclone of emotions that can occur during these times. Just knowing that it's a normal response to feel the dark cloud of trepidation lingering over you during times of change can offer reassurance that there is nothing amiss about the situation. Thirdly, conversations about transitions can introduce parents to the efforts centres have undertaken to ease children towards the idea of change.

On the flip side, gaining knowledge of children's strengths can support parents to acknowledge successes and puppeteer situations whereby the child can continue to experience other opportunities to achieve and feel as though they can tackle a range of problems and situations. The thinking behind such a suggestion lies in the fact that children, when aware of their strengths and abilities, develop resilience and confidence, enabling them to step outside their comfort zone and try new challenges, face new people and embrace the idea of changing environments.

Helping children at home

Inside the home, parents can also support children by simply listening to any concerns and answering any questions children might have. These instances do not start and finish with asking children a plethora of questions, but instead answering questions as honestly as they can, if and only when a child makes an enquiry in the first place. When possible, ask children if they can think of the answers to their own questions. Such strategies encourage children to think for themselves and pushes children to use higher-order thinking skills – something that schools and academic theories place great importance on in today's world.

Understanding the differences between educational settings

While teachers are supportive of children and make every effort to help them transition into the schooling environment, it is imperative to acknowledge that early childhood environments and school classrooms have a few significant differences. Firstly, there is often little flexibility around the expectation for children to sit on carpets or in their seats to complete assigned tasks in school classrooms. Unfortunately, not all children are experts in sitting still and listening. To support children in this area, consider introducing additional games in the home that will improve children's concentration skills. Age-old games like snap, I spy, puzzles, or other age-appropriate board games do wonders. Secondly, children will be expected to demonstrate a greater

ability to be self-sufficient when at school. In short, this means that they will need to be able to look after their own belongings, take responsibility for their property and complete tasks like toileting themselves. Using every opportunity to support children's growing independence will help them enter classrooms with an inflated sense of ability – something that cannot be undervalued as a necessary life-long skill.

For children who have a proclivity for asking a million questions and then another thousand more, revert back to the previous suggestion by asking the children to think of their own answers to their questions. In instances where they answer their own questions in a left-of-centre way that only leads to more questions, give them a nudge to think of a second answer by saying something along the lines of, "Mmm, it sounds good, but it's not quite right. Can you think of another reason?" It can be tempting to jump in and offer children the right answers, but doing so will lock them in their lower-order thinking skills and keep them reliant on adults to provide them with solutions.

Tapping into self-confidence and building self-esteem

Improving self-confidence and self-esteem are the corner stones to success in life. Without them many people fall short of the many amazing things they would otherwise achieve. As a result, think of ways that improve children's self-esteem, some of which are as simple as highlighting when they are doing something well. For the child that likes to fidget, a simple comment that acknowledges their efforts to sit still whilst watching television or at the dinner table (even if it's only for a fleeting moment) can help to lay the foundation of a future belief in one's abilities and a growing willingness to make a more concerted effort in the future.

Finally, children who cling to parents during good-byes and/or those who find the idea of change as appealing as licking Brussels sprouts off the bottoms of their shoes, parents can use a variety of other strategies. First, remain in the pre-frontal cortex (PFC), the part of your brain that helps to spread reason and logic through the land. When children are finding the idea of separation or change difficult they are not in their PFC. When this occurs, the need for parents to use their PFC is never more important. Refrain from asking questions at these times, instead offering acknowledgements that let the child know you can see that they're upset, for example, "The idea of me leaving is very upsetting." Directing several acknowledgements at the child without trying to reassure them that they will be alright often has a profound and unexpected result. Falling silent after these comments is essential because talking more would mean it stops the child's PFC from picking up the threads of calm that you are trying to achieve. Second, refrain from telling children to see reason. If they aren't in their PFC they can't see reason as benefiting them. Therefore less talk coupled with increased acknowledgements and silences are the core skills for getting through these moments.

While there are many other ways to help a child to transition, the main ideas have been covered. Firstly, form links with the school when and where possible. Secondly, keep relationships and avenues of communication open between parents and early childhood professionals. Thirdly, listen to children's concerns when they come up. Avoid asking questions and, where possible, encourage children to answer their own questions. The goal is to promote higher-order thinking skills and bolster children's resilience. Increasing children's self-help skills and encouraging them to take responsibility for their belongings will go a long way in helping a child distinguish the expectations of a school environment. Improving children's concentration skills will enable them to sit, listen and complete tasks, meaning they will not become the focus of a teacher's efforts for the wrong reasons. Finally, using statements that acknowledge a child's efforts and/or emotions helps them to decipher what is occurring in their world and identify when they are doing something well.

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