

Term Time is Looming

September is just around the corner and, whether your children are off to playgroup or off to school, there'll be lots to do to get them ready for the off. Follow our simple guidelines to make sure you don't forget a thing.

If this is your little ones first year at playgroup, don't panic, they will only be gone for around three hours in the day and, even if they find things a little strange at first, within a few short days they will be loving their new-found status in the world, and enjoying every minute of their time with other children in a safe, fun and educational play environment.

Don't expect your child to come home after the first day reciting the alphabet; playgroups are aimed at providing children with opportunities to learn through play. Through a combination of well structured play activities your child will develop the essential skills they will need for school and life. Letters and numbers, colours and shapes will be explored in a fun way, taking the pressure off little ones to 'learn'. Physical play will help develop gross (big) and fine (little) motor skills though jumping or by learning how to pick up small objects like beads for threading.

Playgroup

- **Toileting:** Most playgroups like the children to be fairly well down the road to self-toileting (but understand accidents will happen), so the end of the summer is the time to practice getting it right.
- **Clothes:** Some playgroups have little uniforms, but if yours doesn't think about the practicalities of your child's self toileting when you are fitting him for her out for playgroup. Stick to clothes that are easy to get off and on for the toilet and avoid dungarees.
- **Lunchbox:** your child will just adore carrying her own little lunchbox to playgroup, even if the group is providing the mid-morning snack. Take them shopping to choose their own and give them a confidence boost to set them on their way.
- **Comfort:** If your child is anxious about going to playgroup for the first time, let them bring a comfort item from home. It will help in the early days and, in no time at all, they will forget about bringing it.
- **Hankies:** These may well be an essential item, but they're for usually for you, not your child. It can be hard letting go, but if your child is delighted to be going to playgroup, smile sweetly, let them go and don't cry until you get outside. If your child has difficulties settling in and cries for you, be guided by the playgroup staff. They are trained and qualified to deal with such situations and try to take their advice as to how long you should stay with your child and when and how you should leave the room and the premises.

School

If playgroup is a wrench for parents, the first day at school can be even worse. Your little one is really growing up and their dependence on you is declining as they find their own way in the world. Primary school is a big step in that direction and, perhaps for the first time, you will find your position as the ultimate role model being undermined by a new God or Goddess – their teacher!

The first time you realise that actually ‘teacher knows best’ and you’re just a ‘silly mummy’ can be a bit of a shock, but it’s all part of growing up process for you and your child. As with playgroup, it is only the first couple of days that may need some handling, but soon both you and your child will be enjoying the world of learning. To make sure those first few days pass without hitches, you can make some of the following advance preparations.

- **Book backing:** Once you become a veteran primary school mother, you’ll dread that first week for the sheer amount of extra work it brings backing a seemingly endless stream of books. Be prepared with brown paper, sellotape, string, a marker and some empty cereal boxes. What are the cereal boxes for? Well, they make excellent reusable covers with a string binder for reading books and so on and they’ll actually save you a lot of work in the long run.
- **Uniform:** The crucial thing about buying the uniform is the timing. Buy too early, and your child could have outgrown them before school starts. Buy too late, and the shop could be out of stock. The first two weeks of August are usually a safe bet.
- **Shoes:** The first day at school brings the first ever requirement for ‘good school shoes’. Make sure you get your child’s feet properly measured and the shoes properly fitted. Again, buy too early on and those little feet could have outgrown the school by September. Don’t forget the slip-ons for PE and games.
- **Lunchbox:** Now that they are big, the playgroup lunchbox just won’t do, so treat them to a new lunchbox for school.
- **Schoolbag:** Just because this is ‘only’ primary one, don’t underestimate the book load. Get a bag that’s a good size and easy to carry and manage, whether they want a rucksack or a holdall style.
- **Pencil case:** For primary one a pencil case is just what it says – a pencil case. Your child will need writing pencils and colouring pencils, a rubber, a sharpener and a ruler. Your child won’t need pens, biro or markers, so don’t get those. They probably won’t be allowed to use them in class.
- **Tissues Again!:** The first day at primary school can be a huge wrench, but often it is harder for the parent than the child. As at playgroup, however, the important things are not to let your sad feelings influence the way your child feels about going to playgroup or school and to take the teacher’s advice about when to leave. Save the tears for after your little one has gone through that door and trust the teacher will contact you if they are a serious problem.

Last but by no means least, get ready to enjoy a new year of learning, development and adventure in your child’s life and your own.