

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.

This is a time of great excitement but also anxiety for the whole family – will my child settle, make friends, enjoy this new experience? There are some things you can do as a parent to make this first transition in your child's life as smooth and enjoyable for everyone.

- ✓ Listen to your child
- ✓ Read books about starting playgroup or school to your child
- ✓ Talk with your child about any fears they might have
- ✓ Remember your own experiences of starting something new
- ✓ Build links before starting by visiting the staff or going for a walk to the playgroup or school
- ✓ Become actively involved in playgroup or school life and ask questions
- ✓ Work on making a good impression of playgroup or school life with your child

There are always the practical issues to consider though, so follow our simple guidelines to make sure you don't forget a thing.

If this is your child's first year at playgroup or nursery, 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 and nurseries 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 through jumping or by learning how to pick up small objects like beads for threading.

Playgroup / Nursery

- **Toileting:** Most playgroups and nurseries 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 and nurseries have uniforms, but if yours doesn't then make sure you dress your child in clothing which is practical and hard wearing

- **Lunchbox:** your child will enjoy carrying her own little lunchbox to playgroup or nursery, 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

- Help you child to become familiar with their new environment and routine. Find out about key information such as school layout, location of toilets and the dining hall, drop off and pick up times etc. These may seem like small issues to adults, but can provide much needed reassurance to anxious 4 year olds!
- **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.
- **Shoes:** The first day at school brings the first ever requirement for 'good school shoes'. Make sure you get you 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' year one of school, don't underestimate the book load. Get a bag that's a good size and easy to carry and manage, whether they wants 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. You child won't need pens, biros 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 they 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 have 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.