



Family-Friendly Resource



A program of  
**SickKids**



# Helping Your Child Get Ready for School!

Infant and Early Mental Health Promotion

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## Introduction

September is around the corner, and that means getting ready for school! There are a few things that you can do before school starts and throughout the school year to help your child feel more prepared for this new experience. Below we have some tips and suggestions to make this school year a success!

When transitioning to school, there are two areas that you can focus on: **Routines and Relationships**. These are the things that help children understand what is happening, manage their emotions, and feel safe when there is a big change ahead.

### Routines:

- Children do best when they can expect what comes next!
- Children at this age do not always understand days of the week, or times of the day. They rely on the events of the day to figure out what event will come next. That's why, when possible, keep the routines of home and school the same, even on the weekends and during holidays.

### Relationships:

- When routines have to change, or are just being introduced, children will rely on their relationships to help them learn something new and establish new habits. You might see some big emotions when changing up a routine, and that's alright. This is how children show that changes are hard for them, but with time and practice, it will become easier.
- It's important to be calm, patient, and responsive to your child as they adjust to change. Role modelling and practicing new routines and activities at home can help them to learn and build new skills.



## Things you can do before school starts

### Routines:

- Begin the “night before” or bed time routine of putting lunches together, picking out clothes for the next day, getting pajamas on, and reading a book together, etc.
- Start the morning routine by waking up at the same time each day, brushing teeth, having breakfast, getting dressed, etc.
- Clearly list everyone’s responsibilities, no matter how small they may be (Parent/Caregiver, you pack the lunch in the lunch box the night before, and put it in the backpack the next morning; Child, you help to pick out your clothes the night before, and dress yourself in the morning).
- Encourage your child to eat their snacks and lunch at the times they normally would at school. Give your child opportunities to use their backpack, lunch boxes, and lunch containers, school shoes and jacket, to help them become familiar with how to open, close and put their belongings away, and get used to their new schedule.



## Relationships:

- In the weeks leading up to the first day of school, begin having every day conversations with your child about what to expect at school.
- Make an appointment with the school administrators before the first day of school if possible
- Show your child where to find important areas of the school, such as:
  - The Office
  - Their cubby area
  - Washrooms
- Walk around the school with your child, if allowed, to help them get familiar with the area
- Identify who the safe people are at school, and how to ask for help.
- Show them the pick-up and drop-off areas for walking, cars or buses.
- Show them where their Before and After School area is.



## Things to do once school has begun

### Routines:

- Make time each day to talk to your child about how their day was;
- Tell me what games you played at recess today?
- Who did you sit with at lunch?
- Tell me what kind of things you created/drew/built/made today?

### Relationships:

- Talk to your child about their school day and about their feelings. It's important to take time every day to help them to process how they are feeling.
- Role-playing, or pretend playing a specific situation can be very helpful in your child understanding how to deal with their feelings. Show them the different options they have to express themselves, and what the outcomes might be if they choose that response. Use props and voices to make it more fun!
- Encourage your child to use more of their language and communication skills to express their feelings, wants and needs. Try some of these language tips below.
- Ask open-ended questions. Avoid questions that only lead to a “yes” or “no” answer.
- Make “I wonder” comments “hmm...I wonder what kind of fun things you got to do in class today?” It helps your child reflect on what they actually did that day.
- When waiting for an answer, give longer pauses. Give your child time to process what you've asked, and then answer you, before you try to ask again.
- Reading and/or telling stories is one of the best ways to support language and literacy development
- Extend the topic that you are discussing. Keep it going as long as possible!



- Sing, sing, sing! You can turn anything into a song!
- Follow your child's lead. Conversations should be based on what they are interested in, what they see, hear, smell, taste, feel and touch.
- Respond when your child is speaking to you and give them something to respond to.
- In the car, in the park, or out in the community, talk about what you see, hear, smell, taste, feel and touch!

## **Always remember!**

- YOU are the expert on your child! You know your child best and can share important information with your child's teaching team that will help your child get what they need from the other adults in their life throughout the day.
- Partnering with your child's teaching team is important to your child's school experience being a positive one.
- Talk to your child's teaching team about what your child's strengths and needs are in order to feel safe, heard and cared for.
- Conversations with your child's teaching team do not always have to be about concerns. Share with your child's teaching team other interesting information that leads to more positive conversations. If there are concerns, you have established a relationship with the teaching team and these conversations will go more smoothly. Positive conversations between the adults in your child's life will have a more positive impact on your child's experience in school this year, and for the years to come.