

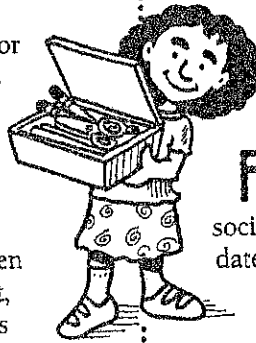
Ready for School

Going to school is a big adjustment for the whole family, whether it will be your child's first time or he's returning for another year. Your daily schedule will change, and everyone will have new responsibilities. Preparing early—and involving your youngster—can make these changes go more smoothly. As you begin the countdown to a new year, try these ideas for building academic skills, creating routines, getting organized, and staying safe and healthy.



A is for Alphabet

Give your child fun opportunities to learn her ABCs and other skills. She can use a chalkboard or dry-erase board to write letters and numbers and draw basic shapes. Let her practice counting with coins or buttons, and teach her colors with crayons or beads.



B is for Behavior

Your youngster can learn good classroom behavior by playing school with you. When it's his turn to be the student, have him sit still and raise his hand before talking. And set a good example by following the rules when he's the teacher.

C is for Calendar

Look over the school calendar, which is usually mailed out or given to parents during registration. On your own calendar, pencil in holidays and special events so your child knows what to expect. Include teacher work days, back-to-school night, and picture day.

D is for Dress Rehearsal

Stage a morning "dress rehearsal." A few days before school begins, set the alarm, get dressed, and eat a healthy breakfast. Drive to school or, if your youngster will be riding the bus, time the walk to his stop. *Tip:* Some schools mail out bus schedules. If you don't receive one, check your local paper, or call the school.

E is for Early

Buy school supplies early—you'll have a larger selection and avoid last-minute crowds. Most teachers send a list of required items. Get your child excited about school by letting her choose which color folder and what kind of pencils to buy.

F is for Friendship

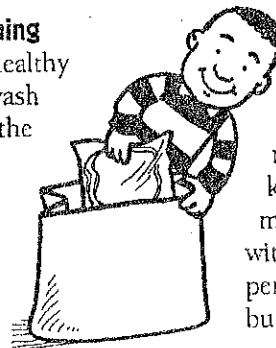
Help your youngster practice social skills with summer play-dates. Start by inviting one child, and gradually increase the number. Be sure you stay nearby so you can step in to help them share toys and speak nicely to one another.

G is for Getting Dressed

Each week, help your youngster put together five outfits and hang them together in the closet. He can pick one each night, and this way he won't have too many choices. Don't forget to lay out socks and underwear the night before.

H is for Hand Washing

Keep your child healthy by reminding her to wash her hands after using the bathroom and before eating. If you've been helping her in the past, make sure she can do it on her own now.



I is for Independence

Besides washing his hands, your youngster will be expected to do other routines independently in school. For example, he will probably need to take care of himself in the bathroom and go to sleep on his own during naptime. Have him practice at home for several weeks before school starts.

J is for Joy

Put a little joy in your back-to-school preparations. Share happy memories of your own school days with your child. You might tell her about your favorite teacher, subjects you enjoyed, and friends you made.

K is for Keeping Safe

Go over safety rules like looking both ways before crossing the street, staying seated on the bus, and not talking to strangers. When you have a few extra minutes, such as while waiting in line at the store, help your youngster practice reciting his full name, address, and phone number.

L is for Lunch Box

Help your child choose a lunch box. When packing it, remember that cold foods should be kept cold and hot foods hot. You might use an insulated lunch box with an ice pack, or choose non-perishable lunches such as peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

Early Years

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M is for Memento

Give your youngster a gift to celebrate the new year. Select something small that she can take to school, such as a package of fun erasers. Wrap it and have her open it before bed so she'll be excited about getting up for school in the morning.



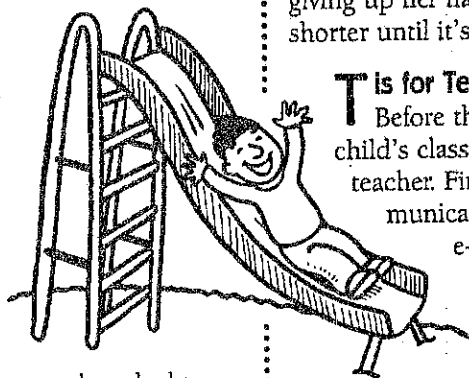
and may just want to know you're still there. As she gets used to school, she should be back to her old self.

N is for Note

Include a surprise note with your child's lunch. If he can't read, draw a picture (such as a heart) and sign your name. You might also include a photo of your family.

O is for Organization

As the school year gets under way, being organized will make life easier. Remind your youngster to always keep her backpack in the same place, perhaps on a peg by the door or in the hall closet. You might store pencils and other homework items in a basket on the kitchen counter.



P is for Prescription

Find out the school's policy on medication. If your child needs medicine during the day, you may be asked to leave it with the school.

Q is for Questions

Encourage your youngster to ask you questions about school. You'll find out what worries him ("What if I don't know how to do my work?"), and you'll be able to reassure him ("You can always ask your teacher for help").

R is for Reading

If you haven't already, set aside 15 minutes each day to read with your child. Consider choosing stories about going to school. *Ideas: I Love You All*

Day Long by Francesca Rusackas; *Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten* by Joseph Slate; *First Day, Hooray!* by Nancy Poydar.

S is for Sleep

During the summer, many children stay up later and sleep in the next morning. Start gradually moving your youngster's bedtime up, and begin waking her a little earlier. If she'll be giving up her nap, make it shorter and shorter until it's gone altogether.

T is for Teacher

Before the first day, visit your child's classroom and meet his teacher. Find out how to communicate with her: by phone, e-mail, or notes. Help your youngster become familiar with the school. You might stop by the office to say hello to the secretary, read some books in the library, or admire the art in the hallways.

U is for Understanding

Be understanding of changes in your youngster's behavior as she settles into her new routine. For example, she may wake in the night to ask for a drink of water—she's been separated from you all day



V is for Vision and Vaccinations

Schedule a checkup. Your child may need a vision test, a hearing

screening, and some vaccinations before starting school. Doctors can be very busy this time of year, so make your appointment early.

W is for Writing

Children write their names a lot in school. Give your youngster paper and pencil, and have him practice writing his name alongside you as you label his belongings. Put his name in permanent marker on everything you'll be sending to school, including his coat and pencil case.

X is for Xs and Os

Be sure to give your little one plenty of kisses and hugs as she starts school. Your loving reassurance will help her deal with her new experiences.

Y is for Yogurt

Involve your child in choosing healthy lunch-box treats, such as yogurt. Other ideas include apples, grapes, crackers, cheese, and carrot sticks. *Tip:* Save time by cutting up enough for several days and storing them in plastic bags.

Z is for Zippers

... and buttons and snaps. If she doesn't know how already, let your child start fastening and unfastening her own clothes and coat. You might also try teaching her to tie her shoes.

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