

School Readiness

The education system sets an age when your child should start school; this varies slightly between systems and states across Australia. Age is usually the first consideration for parents when making a decision about when their child will start school. You may have some concerns about whether your child is ready to start school even if they are the “right” age. There is an eleven-month difference between the youngest eligible child and the child that just misses the cut off date.

To make a decision about school readiness, you may want to consider:

- *Language skills:* communication is used to engage with and teach your child. A child needs to be able to follow instructions and understand what teachers are saying, as well as being able to communicate well with teachers and the other students.
- *Physical well-being:* a child who has a disability or a chronic illness may have difficulty with some aspects of school. This does not automatically mean they are not ready for school but any physical or functional limitations need to be considered.
- *Motor co-ordination and skills:* a child needs co-ordination skills to allow them to dress and undress, unwrap lunch, use a pencil and scissors, and participate in other activities that require eye hand and motor co-ordination.
- *Concentration and emotional adjustment:* a child needs to be able to socialise and play with their classmates. They also need to be able to deal with the structured nature of a more formal learning environment, such as being able to focus on tasks, follow directions and instructions from teachers, cope with transitions, and understand the rules.
- *Independence:* a child needs a range of skills so that they can cope with minimum adult supervision. This includes going to the toilet by themselves, dressing, and being able to follow a structured classroom routine.

Some simple activities that you can do to help your child get ready for school are listed below:

- Read to your child and use books as a pleasurable daily shared activity.
- Make everyday things an exploration of language – ask the child questions, listen carefully to their answers, and encourage the child to ask why.
- Encourage the child’s natural curiosity – do different things with them, encourage them to try different ways of doing things. Make a walk in the park a nature tour.
- Encourage the child to learn to dress and undress independently, and to use the toilet appropriately.
- Make sure the child has crayons and pencils and a supply of paper to draw and write on, and always praise their efforts.
- Encourage your child to mix with other children in different supervised activities so they learn to socialise with their peers, take turns and share their toys and books.

If you are concerned about whether your child is ready to start school, then it is important to get advice that can support you in making this decision. You should talk to the preschool/ kindergarten teacher, the primary school teachers, and other health professionals; they can assist in assessing your child’s development and readiness for school.

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Preparing For School

Below are some recommendations to prepare your child for what will be one of the most important transition stages of his/her life.

Encourage your child to look forward to school by highlighting positive aspects of their new experience. Try to avoid talking in a way that may make your child apprehensive or let your own anxieties be reflected in your child. Encourage your child to take care of and be responsible for their own belongings. At first children need lots of time to learn to do these things independently; please allow them extra time in the short term as it will be paid back to you in the long term.

Give your child plenty of opportunities to practise independently putting on and taking off their socks and shoes, tying up shoelaces, doing up buttons and zippers, and pulling up their pants. Encourage your child to wear clean clothing and be tidy.

Your child will find school easier if he/she has started to learn to:

- Say their full name and address
- Put their things away after finishing
- Recognise and care for their named belongings
- Go to the toilet and adjust clothing, boys should be familiar with the use of urinals
- Flush the toilet after use and wash hands
- Use a tissue or handkerchief properly
- Cover their mouth when coughing or sneezing
- Take off their jumper/jacket
- Pack their bag and place in bag boxes