**How to prepare for your child’s first day at school**

**Source: Akhila Das Blah, Storyteller, Content Developer & Educational Consultant**

Your child’s first day at school will be very difficult. Expect lots of crying. Make sure you carry an extra box of tissues to school. You will need it as your child waves a cheerful goodbye and turns merrily, walking hand in hand with her teacher into school while, you are left standing alone outside the gate, a sloppy mess who has just realized that your little one has taken her first few steps towards adulthood, a place where she will need you less and less, a place where you will no longer[be the centre of her universe.](https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/parenting/parenthesis-motherhood-tips-new-mothers-guilt-5157389/)

Preparing for the first day of school can be a daunting task. For us parents, it’s a bittersweet feeling. While we are so proud of our little ones growing up and becoming independent, our hearts ache that they won’t be little any more. We feel like we are sending a little piece of our hearts out into the world. Will she be happy? Will she make friends? What if someone says something mean to her? Have we made the right choice for our child? For our children, it’s the excitement of a new place with new friends coupled with the anxiety of not having their parent around, in case they need something. By emotionally and practically preparing ourselves, we can make the process of settling into school a lot easier.

Visit the school together. If allowed in, take a tour of the school with your child. Point out places of interest like the playground, classroom and the toilets. If you can meet the teacher, it’s an added bonus.

If you aren’t allowed in, a simple drive to the school will suffice. If your child will be using the school bus, show her the bus stop. Point to other school buses on the road and talk about how most children go to school by bus.

If your child seems a little anxious, read a few storybooks about starting school or the first day of school to her. Sometimes, it’s only a fear of the unknown that may cause her to be anxious. By discussing all the different types of activities that will happen in school, it makes it easier for your child to visualize them and will help to reassure her.

Take her on a shopping trip for all school related things. Let her choose her own backpack, lunchbox and water bottle. If they have to wear uniforms, get an extra set. They will get dirty, especially the white ones. Make the shopping trip an adventure rather than a chore. Label everything, including the shoes. Things will find their way to the lost and found department but it’s just so much easier when it’s all labeled.

Teach your child how to go to the washroom on their own and the importance of washing their hands often. Children are still building their immunity at this stage and germs get passed around fairly easily. By washing their hands often, they reduce their chances of falling sick on a regular basis.

On the first day of school, let her take something small to school, anything that connects home to school. Carrying an object from home will provide her with a sense of security. It can be a little book to share with the class or a sticker that she wants to give her new teacher. Some schools allow parents in on the first day. Check with the school on their policies and prepare your child accordingly.

If they don’t allow you in, make sure you let your child know in advance. Don’t surprise her on the day. It’s not a very pleasant surprise. Tell her you will be dropping her off to school and saying bye at the gate like all the other parents. And you will be back to pick her up. If they allow you in, don’t hang around too long. Settle her in and leave. The quicker you leave, the easier it will be for her to adjust and adapt to her new surroundings. If your child is crying, take your cues from the teachers. They know their job. They have dealt with many children and know exactly what to do in this situation. If they say leave, do so.

You chose this school because you trusted them to look after your child. Now, allow them to do their job.

Watch your body language and tone carefully. Children feed off your energy. Be upbeat and positive about the whole experience. Don’t showcase your worries and fears. Do not cry in front of her. Wait at least until the school gate shuts behind you.

Say hello to the other worried parents who are also standing around aimlessly. This group will be your support system for the next 12 years. Exchange numbers and make sure you are part of the class group chat. As annoying as the endless forwards are, they are also useful for the little tit-bits of essential information that sometimes comes through.

When you pick her up from school, ask her specific questions like who she played with during recess. Did something funny happen in class today? What was her favourite part of the day? Questions like ‘How was your day?’ tend to elicit monosyllabic responses like ‘good’ or ‘fine’. Some children take a little longer to adapt to their new environment and make new friends. Encourage her to take all her fears and concerns to a teacher and not be worried about speaking up in class. Invite classmate’s home for a play date to help strengthen the home-school connection. As the days pass, both you and your child will settle into the routine of school. And you will start to enjoy the little extra free time that you now have.