

Starting on the right foot-your child's first day of school

By Suze Hargraves

The valley is awash with smiling adults. Shopping for things like pencils and paper seems to bring an almost celebratory joy to exhausted parents everywhere. As much as we love the little darlings, it's almost time to pack their tiny backpacks, kiss them fondly on their freshly groomed heads and send them off into the world of education for the very first time. That's how it works. We did it. Now it's their turn. Some of these brave new scholars are consumed and excited by the wonder of it all. Some are kicking and screaming while clutching your leg as if it were the last life preserver on the Titanic. Whichever child you have here are a few pointers on making the first day of school a good one.

Routines are incredibly important to the security and self confidence of children. When it comes to preparing your little one for kindergarten or first grade some advance work on your part can be the difference between a great, exciting day and a major disaster. Here are a few tips from <http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/publications/factsheets/back-to-school> to help ease into the back to school routine.

- Find a set bed-time that lets your kids feel well-rested in the morning
- Practice the back to school routine a few times before the first day (e.g., go to bed, get up, dress, eat breakfast, brush teeth, and be out the door by 8am).
- Have your child help prepare what you can the night before (pick out clothes, pack healthy lunch your child likes, pack school bag, etc).
- Talk to your child's school and find out about the school routines. Help your child to understand what is expected – practice new or difficult skills at home before school starts.

For those children who don't respond well to change or who are more likely to be the "Titanic" type on that first day, you need to begin to manage that anxiety before school starts. If your child is anxious about starting school you can try these tips (from the same source) to ease things along:

- Respond to signs of anxiety by talking to your child about school concerns
- Make time to listen when kids want to talk - review your child's worries one at a time and help them problem solve so they don't become overwhelmed
- Try not to add to your child's pressures unnecessarily
- Help your child to understand that no one is good at everything – both parents and kids do better at some things than others.
- Be involved with school related activities or events - praise your child for positive efforts even if you don't see the results yet.

Your child's initial experience with school can shape their attitudes and opinions about future education. By taking some time to be involved in your child's education, being supportive, communicating with your child's teachers and being well prepared we, as adults, can begin to shape a positive educational experience for our children.

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