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Kindergarten Preparation: It's Not Just for the Kids

The first day of kindergarten might be intimidating to a child, what with the new people, new surroundings, and new schedule. But many parents don't realize how stressful it will be for themselves, and fail to prepare for the transition from home and preschool to the full-fledged elementary school experience. Luckily, there are many ways to ease both yourself and your child into the education system, and it's just a matter of doing a bit of groundwork in advance.

For the parent:

- Visit the school with your child to meet teachers, principal, and other staff so you know who your child will be spending time with during the day.
- Find out what the school needs for entry, including immunizations, documentation, physicals, etc.
- Make sure all enrollment forms are complete and submitted before school starts.
- Get a copy of the school calendar and times of operation.
- If necessary, find out about after-school programs and their respective costs.
- Decide on transportation – will you drop off/pick up, or will your child be taking the school bus?
- Make arrangements for your child's meals, whether it's school or home lunch.
- See if there are ways for you to get involved; perhaps you might volunteer as class parent.

For the child:

- Talk to your child about the upcoming changes and gauge the level of emotions such as fear or nervousness, then try to alleviate those negative feelings by taking some or all of the steps listed below.
- Find out if there is a program that allows you to take your child to eat in the school cafeteria during the summer before kindergarten starts, so he or she will be able to get used to eating in a new place.
- If possible, contact the parents of other kids in your child's class before school starts to arrange a playdate. That way, your child will see familiar faces on the first day of school.
- If there is an orientation at your child's new school during the summer, take him or her to meet the teachers and principal.
- Establish a "school year routine" in the month prior to the first day of kindergarten; arrange bed time, wake-up time, breakfast, and getting ready in the morning so your child is used to the schedule before school starts. This will help a great deal to ease the transition once school really does begin.
- On the first day of school—and perhaps every day of the first week—arrive early enough that you will have plenty of time to make sure your child is comfortable in his or her new surroundings before you leave. Don't attempt to sneak out while your child is distracted; he or she may consider this a breach of trust, and the transition will only be harder in the long run.
- Teaching your child a few essential skills before sending him or her off to school will make the lives of your child, his or her teacher, and you as a parent much easier. Make sure your child knows how to read and write his or her name, tie his or her shoes, and use the bathroom alone. Calling his or her teacher before school starts to find out whether there's anything else your child should know is also a good idea.

Kindergarten doesn't need to be stressful or frightening for anyone involved. Make the transition as smooth as possible by putting in the effort ahead of time, and both you and your child will reap the rewards. For more tips on readying your child for kindergarten, visit education.com/topic/preparing-for-kindergarten.