

THE ABC OF STARTING SCHOOL RIGHT

As a new school year begins, the long sunny summer days, sleep-ins and joyous lack of routine dissipate for another year and school uniforms, weekly timetables and stationery lists come back in to focus.

The relaxed laziness holidays manage to bring is all too quickly replaced by anxieties and stressors that seem to just slip to the fore. Even kids who are ready and excited to see all their mates again can dread the establishment of new structures life with a new teacher and in a new class requires.

But starting school doesn't have to be all frazzle and no fun. In fact, with these few simple tips, your child can be ready for that first day and confident in the year ahead:

A is for Acknowledgement

If your child is feeling nervous, anxious or even super-excited, it is important that both you and they acknowledge those feelings. Help them understand that whatever it is they are feeling is normal – any sort of change can bubble a mixture of emotion to the surface. But rather than simply reassure them that 'everything will be ok', help them make a plan to address any source of concern. Talk through what the absolute worst-case scenario might be and brainstorm together how that situation could be dealt with. Feel free to be a little dramatic! Being a little over-the-top can help lighten the mood.

Also be sure to discuss expectation management. Some kids start school on a real high, expecting to spend their days hanging out happily with all their friends or soaring through the curriculum because they found last year 'easy'. A positive approach is gloriously fantastic, but it helps to check-in that your child isn't

setting themselves up for an emotional crash and burn. Review some highs and lows from last year and reflect on how every school year will have its really good and not so good days.

And for those who find their child a little reluctant to engage in such intimate interactions? There's no need to sign-post such a discussion as a 'feelings talk'. Join them in taking the dog for a walk or kicking the footy or drawing a picture then just casually work the topic into the conversation.

B is for B-Side

Whatever happens, there is always the B-side. That is, there is always another way of viewing the situation, another perspective. For anything that doesn't actually go as your child would have liked, work with them to look at the B-Side and see that with the right perspective, all situations have positive potential.

Your son doesn't get the teacher they wanted? Disappointing, but the B-Side? He will quickly develop skills in working in unexpected conditions or building new connections – something that will help him in all aspects of life.

Your daughter's best friend is in another class? Upsetting, but the B-Side? She will have to develop skills in making new friends and working with others. Most likely, she'll simply end up with more friends actually making the social aspect of school even more enjoyable, and will learn a bit more about herself along the way.

C is for Create Goals and Consequences

School reports may seem a distant memory now, but they are actually an excellent learning tool. Work with your child to review how they could approach their subject-specific or general approach to learning and set meaningful but achievable goals, such as:

'I will keep my school bag organised by packing it before bed each night'

'I will complete my homework between 5pm and 6pm every night'

'I will master all the times tables by practicing one each day in the bath'

'I will choose to sit at a desk where I will be less tempted by distraction.'

But just as important as academic learning goals is the setting of personal goals. That is, help your child work on social or emotional skills that they could also benefit from developing. Again, be as specific as possible:

'I will share at least one of my own ideas in each group task'

'I will use positive-self talk rather than think others are talking behind my back'

'I will invite a classmate I don't usually play with to my house at least once a term'

'I will not give up if I do badly on a test but ask my teacher how to improve.'

Be sure to help your child stay motivated with their goals by asking about them at least once a week, or make some sort of visual progress chart to display in the kitchen. Also work with them to decide on the consequences of achieving their goal or not within a set timeframe as this will help them stay motivated.

And remember, as a parent, your actions often really do speak louder than words. Model an optimistic and organised approach to the new school year and your child will see that with the right mindset, anything is possible.

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