

Starting school: Preparing your child



MANA AKE
STRONGER FOR TOMORROW

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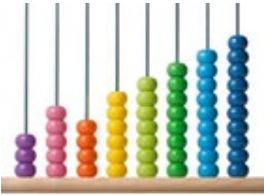
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School readiness



Even more important than ABCs, is learning to mix with others and looking after yourself.

But what about our worries?



Be brave! Children copy us, so you need to be a good role-model. Look after yourself, as well as them.

For your tamariki



Be positive! They are going to be awesome (and so are you!).

Wow, this is an exciting time for you and your whānau, but it can makes us all worry a bit ...

Will they be ok? Will the other children like them?

What if someone is mean or unkind to them?

It's natural to worry about those we love – as whānau we all have the strong urge to make everything ok for them.

Here are some tips and hints to help the journey into school go smoothly:

School readiness

We can get carried away focusing on colours, numbers, shapes, recognising letters, writing/recognising their name, however keep the basics front and centre:

Encourage self-management skills

- Can they manage their own toileting? Can they wash their hands without prompting?
- Can they carry their own bag?
- Can they put their own shoes on?
- Can they do up and take off their jacket?
- Can they put their togs on and off/change independently?
- Can they ask for things they need?

Encourage them to be curious – asking questions is a big part of being curious – and we all want our tamariki to be confident enough to ask questions, right?

Help them practice listening – reading to them is one of the best ways to do this.

Practical preparations help too, like organising uniforms, lunch boxes and bags well ahead of the first day of school.

Starting school can be easier if your child is familiar with the school environment. Orientation or transition activities are a good idea.

- Visit the school or kura with your child.
- Get the principal and teacher to meet your child.
- Arrange some settling in visits with their teacher before their first day.
- Have a play at the school in the weekend - run around, climb on the playground equipment, kick a ball on the field.

Play with them – games that teach them about turn taking really help them cope in the classroom and playground.

Knowing what ‘no’ and ‘stop’ means – put boundaries in place and reinforce them, so they understand about rules and when adults might be guiding them to stay safe.

Spend time with other children, so they learn how to socialise, interact and share – preferably without hovering too much, but guiding them to own their actions.

These may seem like very simple strategies - and are all things that you are probably doing. However, it is always good to acknowledge and celebrate what we are doing already!

But what about our worries?

It’s totally understandable that you will have a mind full of worries and ‘what if’s’ hanging around, but try to keep these in mind:

- Worrying about your child’s first day/week/term at school is totally natural, however your actions and how you manage your own behaviour will have an influence on their behaviour.
- The most powerful lessons we teach are the ones we demonstrate.
- Model brave behaviour – try new things and take some risks – this will help your child be brave too.

- Avoid avoidance – fears have a way of growing and making things harder in the long run. Avoid changing plans to accommodate anxious thoughts.
- Remember that issues around starting school are temporary and can be worked through – the teaching staff are there to support your whānau – everyone will be ok, even if things don't go quite right some days, there is another day to try again tomorrow.
- Show them how you cope, when you are anxious, for example, say, “I'm just going to take some big, slow, deep breaths to help me keep calm”. Remember they're watching and learning from what you do – you can feel anxious and cope, and so can they.
- As a parent we often put ourselves last on the list – think about your own self care – are you eating well, getting exercise, getting enough sleep? Reach out to those who could help. Take a bath. Have some time out.

For your tamariki

- Try not to pre-empt your child's feelings – ask “How do you feel about school today?” not “Are you worried about school today?”
- Listen to your child and show you care – hugs are great.
- Tell them that worrying is normal – be supportive and don't minimise their fears – avoid statements like “there's nothing to worry about” and instead say things like “things that are new can be a bit scary”.
- It's ok to talk about feelings, and then figure out ways to cope with them.
- Be aware of too much reassurance – promote their self-confidence and ability to cope.
- Talk about other challenges your whānau has overcome, eg first day of pre-school, music class, swimming lessons, etc. Remember the strengths your tamariki has and how these will help them.

- If challenges arise, try to brainstorm solutions with your child – teaching them to problem solve is another great way to support them with their learning.
- Look on the bright side, and encourage and share positive thoughts.
- Set expectations and limits – tamariki like to know the rules – praise when they are doing well and support them to keep trying.
- Establish good routines in the morning, after school and at bedtime.
- Plan some physical activity, fun and laughter – get outside, get the board games out, find the humour in things.

Help them to get ready to learn

They may find it easier to participate in the class if they:

- can sit on a chair at a table for a short time to complete an activity
- are comfortable being away from you
- know how to take turns, and wait for things
- know the names of colours
- know the letters of the alphabet
- know the numbers 1 to 9
- can hold a pencil correctly and use scissors
- can write their name
- are able to hold a picture book and turn the pages carefully

Every time we try something new, like starting school, we experience anxious thoughts – it's healthy and natural – and the best way to respond is with brave behaviour – resilience is what we are striving for.

They are going to be awesome – and so are you!

And to end, a poem

First Day of School

I wonder what you are doing now, and if everyone is being kind.
I hope there's a special person, a nice friend that you can find.

I wonder if the teacher knows, how dear you are to me.
And if the brightness in your heart, is something they can see.

I wonder if you think of me, and if you need a hug.
I already miss your sweet voice, and how you give my leg a tug.

I wonder if you understand, how hard it is to let you grow.
On this day know my heart breaks, as I learn to let you go.

More information:

The Ministry of Education's website has useful advice for parents and whānau
<https://parents.education.govt.nz/primary-school/your-child-at-school/enrolling-and-starting-your-child-at-school/>

References:

Sparklers – How to help children manage worries - sparklers.org.nz

Anxiety BC – Helpful tips for parents

Nine Things Every Parent with an anxious child should try – heysigmund.com

School Refusal: Children 5-8 years – raisingchildren.net.au

The things loving parents do that might unintentionally feed anxiety in children
– and what to do instead – Karen Young

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