

Starting School

Professor Matt Sanders

SOME CHILDREN CANNOT WAIT TO START SCHOOL AND EAGERLY LOOK FORWARD TO THEIR FIRST DAY. FOR OTHER CHILDREN THE REALITY OF STARTING SCHOOL CREATES ANXIETY AND WORRY. CHILDREN COPE BETTER WITH THESE TRANSITIONS WHEN THEY ARE WELL PREPARED.

Here are some ideas for preparing children to start school.

Talk or read to your child about starting school.

Answer questions and talk about school, but don't overload the child with information all at once. Check out a local bookstore or library for children's books on starting school. These books can be read often to children as a way of preparing them for what lies ahead.

Tell your child when school will start and make sure they are familiar with the surroundings. You may have already taken your

child to visit the school but if you haven't, make sure they know where the toilets, lunch and play areas are.

If possible, involve your child in buying things for school such as stationery, schoolbags, lunch box, clothes or uniform.

Let your child know that you will be there on the first day.

On the first day, most schools permit parents of new entrants to stay with their child until they are settled. This is reassuring to a youngster who may be feeling anxious. If you say you're going to stay, make sure you do.

On the first day at school stay with your child as long as you are required.

Make yourself as unobtrusive as possible but gently prompt your child to become involved in the classroom's activities rather than clinging to you. Some children who have had separating problems at preschool may experience similar problems now. If your child

usually gets upset when you leave but settles quickly when you're gone, be prepared to explain you are going, say goodbye, and leave.

It might take a few days for your child to get used to being in the new situation. However, most children quickly adapt to the excitement and challenge of starting school. Occasionally children can develop a marked fear of going to school (school phobia). Usually such children are not frightened of school per se, although some can be, but they are afraid of separating from their parents. If your child is extremely difficult to get to school, complains of aches and pains on school mornings, screams and in other ways protests about going to school, seek professional advice on how best to handle the situation. Generally speaking, it is very important that such a child miss as little school as possible. Speak to your child's teacher or family doctor, who can tell you where professional assistance can be obtained.

Find more parenting tips at: manitoba.ca/triplep or call 945-4777 in Winnipeg or toll-free 1-877-945-4777.

Professor Matt Sanders is founder of the Triple P - Positive Parenting Program.

