

Countdown to Kindergarten

- 12 months before:** Find out what kindergarten programs are available in your community and what their application and admissions policies are, especially if you are interested in private or parochial schools. Visit them – be sure to do so while class is in session. Some will allow or even encourage you to bring your child, while others prefer that he stay at home until later in the admissions process.

- 9 months before:** Many public school districts begin registering kindergarteners in January, February, and March for the following fall (registration continues throughout the spring and summer). Call your district or check the local newspaper to find out the start date, as well as any admission requirements – often all you need is proof of age and residence. If your child misses the age cut-off but you think she is ready for kindergarten, ask about whether she can be tested to override the cut-off.

- 6 months before:** Begin talking with your child about school (he may very well be asking questions already), but keep it casual. Point out the building as you drive by, or mention while coloring that there will be lots of fun art projects in kindergarten. He will pick up on your feelings, so stay positive and excited – without being overwhelming! It's a delicate balance.

- 3 months before:** Review school policies to learn how teachers will help your child make the transition. Many offer a phase-in period to help her acclimate, or will schedule home visits prior to day one. You may also be able to learn her classmates' names in advance (by calling the school; some may send you a class list), so you can set up some get-to-know-you play dates.

- 1 to 2 months before:** Read books about kindergarten to familiarize your child with the concept. Stories will also prompt conversation about his own new school. But don't focus exclusively on these kinds of books – keep reading other favorites too.

- 1 to 2 months before:** Walk by the school and visit the grounds regularly. Let your child play on the swings and even peek in the windows. This brings the concept of school to life. If possible, take her inside for a tour so she can see where she'll arrive, hang her coat, use the bathroom, have lunch, visit the library, etc. Point out navigational cues such as the color of the floor or walls, or the number of windows she'll pass on the way to her classroom.

- 4 weeks before:** If necessary, begin to adjust sleep schedules so that bedtime and waking coordinate with the school schedule.

- 2 to 3 weeks before:** If your child will be riding the bus for the first time, begin preparing him for this new experience. Point out busses you see on the road, practice walking to the stop, and review the rules and expectations. Some districts even offer practice trips on the bus in advance. If yours does, take advantage.

- 2 weeks before:** Go school shopping. Have your child help you pick out a few new (washable, comfortable) outfits, some shoes, or a backpack. Being involved gives her a sense of control.

- 1 week before:** Get out your label-maker. Everything that goes into the classroom should have your last name on it, if you'd like to see it again! Your child can help by coloring this printable backpack label.

- A few days to 1 week before:** Encourage your child to write a letter or draw a picture for his teacher. Handing it to her on Day One will be a nice way to foster a connection. You can write an accompanying letter or addendum describing your child's learning style and any special quirks or issues he is facing (sick grandparent, divorce, medical issues, etc.).

- 1 day before:** Prepare everything in advance – your child's clothing and lunch; any supplies the school has asked you to provide; your camera! Remind her that tomorrow is her first day, but again, keep it low key.

- On the first day:** Start the day with a hearty, fun breakfast. You might even start a new tradition with a special dish; and don't forget to take pictures! Allow plenty of time to arrive at school, and plan to spend some time in the classroom once you get there. The first day may be a shortened session. It could be a few days to a week before the class works up to the planned schedule.

- For the first few weeks:** Take your time making the transition. Every child will respond differently. Work with the teachers to help yours adjust.