

GET READY FOR SCHOOL!

YOU MAY KNOW WHEN YOUR CHILD IS READY TO START SCHOOL, BUT WHAT ARE SCHOOLS LOOKING FOR? TEACHERS WANT CHILDREN WHO ARE HEALTHY, SOCIALLY MATURE, CAPABLE AND EAGER TO LEARN.

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CHECKLIST: SCHOOL READINESS

You can use this school readiness list compiled by writers and educators Peggy Gisler and Marge Eberts to assess your child's capabilities as they near school age.

CAN YOUR CHILD...

- Listen to stories without interrupting.
- Pay attention for short periods of time to adult-directed tasks.
- Understand actions have causes and effects.
- Show understanding of general times of the day.
- Cut with scissors.
- Trace basic shapes.
- Begin to share with others.
- Start to follow rules.
- Be able to recognise authority.
- Manage bathroom needs.
- Button shirts, pants, coats, and use zippers.
- Begin to control oneself.
- Separate from parents without being upset.
- Speak understandably.
- Talk in complete sentences of five to six words.
- Look at pictures then tell stories.
- Recognise rhyming sounds.
- Identify the beginning sound of some words.
- Identify some alphabet letters.
- Recognise some common sight words such as 'stop'.
- Sort similar objects by colour, size and shape.
- Recognise groups of one, two, three, four and five objects.
- Count to 10.
- Bounce a ball.

CHECKLIST: SCHOOL CLOTHES & SHOES

It's best to leave the shopping until January when the sales start, especially if there's a last-minute growth spurt.

Here are some tips:

- Buy a size up where you can. This is usually easier with tops and jackets rather than pants.

- School shoes get a lot of wear, so invest in good-quality ones that will last the year.
- Until your child can tie their laces, get them shoes with velcro fasteners.
- Get enough shirts or dresses to save the mid-week wash and iron. Clothing pools help keep this cost down (you'll only need one night when you remember at 10pm that you have no clean school clothes to realise this is a good idea).
- If you can, take one child at a time shoe shopping, for your own sanity. Go in the morning before they're too tired or hungry and the crowds arrive.
- Invest in better-quality jackets and raincoats if there are siblings to pass these on to.
- If your school has a uniform, hit the clothing pool in term 4 to snap up some discounts.
- In term 4, approach parents of kids a year ahead and arrange to purchase uniforms for activities such as ballet or martial arts.

TIP Get the kids out of their school clothes (and in the habit of putting them away or in the laundry) as soon as they get home so they're not playing and eating dinner in them. The clothes will require less washing and remain in better condition.

CHECKLIST: SCHOOL BAGS

Always go for an ergonomically friendly backpack

- Heavy nylon is durable, but heavy cotton is machine washable (once a term at most, unless there's a horrible accident). Steer clear of the plastic ones, as they won't last.
- Be conscious of size, especially for smaller children. Try the bag on to check it doesn't overwhelm them.
- You'll need to fit a lot in (lunchbox, hat, jumper) so make sure it has easy access, adjustable straps and a couple of outer pockets or compartments for drink bottles, umbrellas and so forth.

CHECKLIST: LIBRARY AND SPORT BAGS

- Variety stores have good selections of cloth bags.
- Get the same bag in a different colour/pattern for each child so they're easy to recognise.

TIP Store library books inside the library bag so you don't lose them among your own books.

CHECKLIST: STATIONERY

- Check with the school about what stationery is required. Schools usually put lists out at the end of the year and on their website.
- Buy stationery as stocking fillers for Christmas, or stock up during the January sales.
- Keep a couple of permanent markers handy in the kitchen. They're great for quickly labelling clothes and some plastics.

CHECKLIST: LUNCHBOXES

- Use the same lunchbox in different colours for each child.
- Purchase stackable lunchboxes to save cupboard space.
- Opt for a design that's easy to clean. Lots of compartments are hard to wash and dry by hand.
- Make sure younger children can open the clasp of the box and any containers you put inside.
- Don't get a lunchbox that's too flat and can't fit items such as fruit, or something so bulky it won't easily fit into a backpack.
- A small icepack or frozen yoghurt in the lunchbox keeps everything cool for recess.

CHECKLIST: DRINK BOTTLES

- Having tried absolutely every variation, I think the basic screw-top plastic bottle is best.

CHECKLIST: HOME ORGANISATION

- Bags And Shoes**
 - Place a storage unit with large drawers at the front door and allocate each child a 'shoe drawer' and a 'bag drawer'. When you get home, put bags and shoes in their proper drawers, take lunchboxes and drink bottles to the sink and put any notes from school on the kitchen bench.
- Fridge Planner**
 - Buy a large weekly planner whiteboard for the fridge with a line for each person in the family to note who's doing drop-offs and pick ups each day and who's cooking dinner.
- Handy Lists**
 - Weekly recurring events list for each child (Monday: ballet; Wednesday: library).
 - Emergency-numbers list.
 - Class lists with contact details in a handy spot, such as above your desk or on the fridge.
 - Morning routine list (with pictures or illustrations) where the kids can see it.

EXTRA TIPS

LUNCHBOXES

Use a mix of small plastic containers, cling wrap, paper bags or snap-lock bags to pack the lunch inside a plain rectangular box.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES BAGS

Place the required outfit and/or equipment for each activity (such as ballet) into a separate bag. Hang in the same place for each child. This will help you and your kids find what's needed each week.

ARTWORK

Collect artwork/schoolwork in a cane basket on a shelf (one per child). Hang up or display a favourite piece for a couple of weeks, then take a photo and throw it all out. If there's a special piece (to them or you), store it in an A4-sized box with a lid or folder and sort the contents every now and then. Make sure you name and date the artworks.

PARTY INVITES

Check your availability and respond fairly quickly (otherwise they will loiter on the kitchen bench). Enter it into your diary and include the address and time so you know where you're going even if you lose the invitation.

NOTES TO/FROM SCHOOL

Some schools are entering the technological age and sending out email newsletters and using online booking for events, and even apps, but there's always notes flying around.

Set up a reminder in your diary a day or two before the note needs returning, or put it on the fridge planner.

Respond by email (to the teacher and/or school office) and attach a scan or photo of the signed form.

Create a 'staging post' near the front door for things that need to go back to school that morning. If it's at the front door (usually with a sticky-note instruction on it), it should make it to school.

Some parents find a Sunday night 'diary sync' handy so they know who's doing what in the coming week(s).

NAMETAGS & LABELS

Buy a labeller: it will change your life. They're about \$30-\$50, and you can not only label the kids' belongings, but storage containers in the pantry, plastic tubs of off-season or larger-sized clothes at the top of cupboards, boxes for artwork or other keepsakes, and even the linen-cupboard shelves. Choose a different coloured label for each child and for the family. Make sure they can go in the dishwasher. The family labels are great on trays and containers that are sent to school for events such as cake days. You can also stick them on books, DVDs, and special news items if they're going to school or you're lending them out.