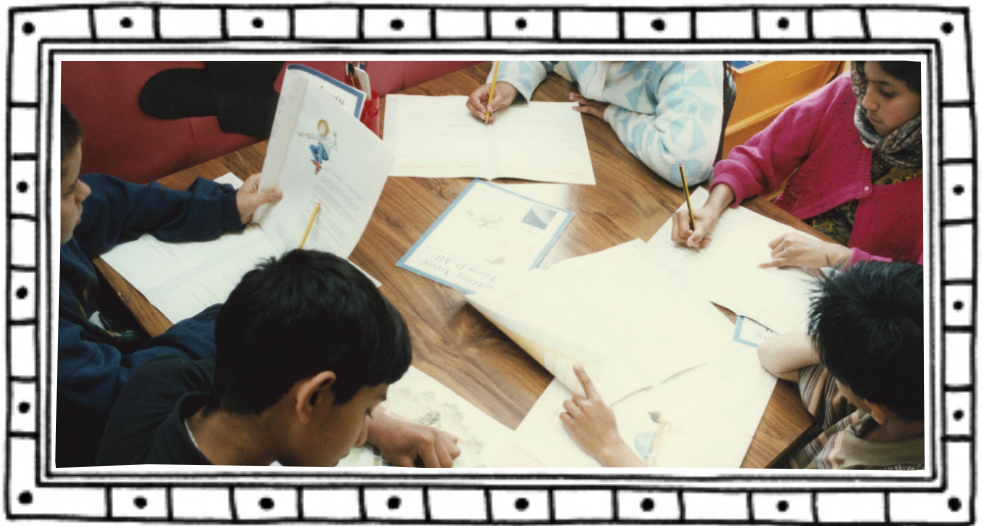


Primary school

Off to a good start





Starting primary school is daunting – both for children and their families. It marks a big change in family life, especially if it's the eldest or youngest child who is going.

You may feel sad and have all sorts of worries: will they be unhappy – or worse still, bullied? Will they make friends? What will you do with yourself once they're at school? Your child may be frightened or excited about the move to 'big school' – or totally confused about the whole thing.

Although the build-up to starting primary may be nerve-racking, with a little planning you can help make it a memorable experience for all the right reasons.

At Family Lives, we're here to help you deal with any worries or concerns at this important time. Contact us on Parentline: **0808 800 2222** – Family Lives free, confidential helpline. We offer advice, information and support on all aspects of parenting and family life.

Our website: Join our lively online community and connect with other families at this and every stage of your child's life. Visit www.familylives.org.uk where you'll also find a wealth of articles and information on key issues including bullying and the school-home relationship.

Starting school tips

Before school starts:

- Most primary schools hold an introductory session for new children. This is a good opportunity for children to 'try out' the school and meet their classmates and teacher in advance of their first day. Tell the school about any special needs, medical problems, likes or dislikes your child has.
- If the school has a website, browse this occasionally with your child in the weeks before they start. Talk positively and in a relaxed way about starting school, share some funny stories about your time at school and listen to any worries your child has.
- Sometimes children starting school worry about things that may seem trivial, like where to put their lunchbox. Build your child's confidence by letting them know its ok to ask if they're unsure about anything.
- Read some positive books about starting school together. Ask at your library for suggestions.
- Shop together for uniform and don't leave it until the last minute, to avoid any worries about not having the right items.
- The week before your child starts school, help them adapt to the new routine by making sure they go to bed and get up earlier.
- Travel to and from the school at least once before the first day, so the journey will become familiar to your child – and you'll know exactly how much time to allow.
- Talk about any concerns you have away from your child, so he/she doesn't pick up on any negative feelings. Remind yourself that it's perfectly normal for you to feel a bit tense too.

The first day:

- Be up in good time. It may help to get uniform ready and prepare any snacks or packed lunches the night before. Encourage your child to help you with this.
- When saying goodbye, do your best to send your child off with a smile and a wave, even if you feel upset.
- It can be difficult to leave if your child is distressed or clinging on to you. However upset they seem, most children settle quickly once left. If you're worried, call the school when you get home to check how things are.
- Make sure you arrive on time to meet your child, or even a little early. A few minutes wait can seem like an eternity to young children.

During the year:

- Try to ensure you start off on the right foot with the school. Be friendly and open in your phone calls or meetings. If you feel annoyed by anything, keep calm – remember, you'll be seeing a lot of them over the years your child is at primary school.
- Try to go to as many school meetings as you can. If you can't attend give the school a call and ask for the information to be sent to you.
- Make sure your child gives you any letters that are sent home. It's a good idea to check their book bag regularly.
- Check the school website regularly for details of any upcoming events, and try to attend as many as you can. Becoming involved in the life of the school improves the school-home relationship for both you and your child.



Family problems?

We can help with any aspect of parenting or family life, including starting school



Free¹ confidential helpline on **0808 800 2222** for advice, information and support on any aspect of parenting and family life



Or Skype us via our website – www.familylives.org.uk

We offer advice and information as well as extended support for complex and difficult issues.



Face-to-face support groups and workshops. Find out what is available in your area at – www.familylives.org.uk/localsupport



Online advice and information on all aspects of parenting and family life

Give and receive support and advice from other parents and adult family members experiencing similar problems – forum.familylives.org.uk/forum

Advice and information for professionals working with families at – www.familylives.org.uk/professionals

¹From landlines and most mobile networks.

