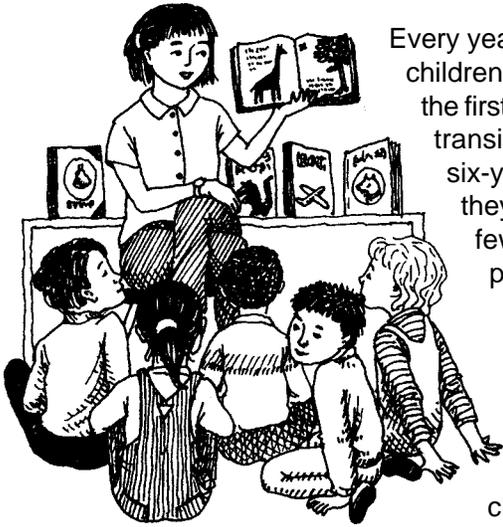


BANANAS HANDOUT

Helping Your Child Enter Kindergarten



Every year, a new group of children enters school for the first time. This is a big transition for five- and six-year-olds, whether they've spent the last few years attending preschool, child care, or staying home with a parent or sitter. The thrill of going to "big kid school" can be exciting, challenging, scary and confusing all at

once. Children usually pick up on their parents' attitudes so you can help by talking about school in a positive way. This handout will give you tips on how you can prepare your children for kindergarten – along with ideas to help new kindergartners thrive in school.

What to do Before School Starts

Preparing children ahead of time calms fears of the unknown and helps make the transition easier on children and parents alike. Share stories about your own kindergarten days – if you can still remember them! Reading books to your child about what kindergarten is like and how other youngsters deal with the kindergarten jitters can help your child get ready for the big day. See the book list on the back page for suggestions.

Find out if other children in your neighborhood will be attending your child's school and arrange some playdates before school starts. Your child will share school experiences with some new friends. If you have access to a computer, many schools have Internet clubs that you can join, either started by a neighborhood group or by the school's PTA. Ask your school administrators if this is so, and find out how to sign up. This is a great way to stay informed about school activities and who's available for playdates. If your school is having a carnival or hosting a performance, bring your child and enjoy the event together.

Introduce Your Child to the New School – Ask your school principal if you can visit the school before classes

begin. Practice the trip to school several times. With the principal's permission, let your child play in the playground. Find out where the bathrooms are. Show your child the kindergarten classrooms and the principal's office. See if it's possible to meet the teachers, the principal and the school secretary. This applies to all school-age children. Even second and third children who have visited their older siblings at school need to know where their new classrooms are.

Getting There – If your child will be taking the bus, make sure s/he knows to stay seated and to talk quietly during the bus ride. In the spring, practice walking to the bus stop and watching kids get on and off the bus. You can relieve some anxiety by giving your child a card with the correct stop written on it to show the teacher or driver, should panic strike.

If you're driving your child to school, find out where the drop-off zones are and use them to avoid unsafe crossings. Typically, cars can only stop briefly in the drop-off area to let children out. If you want to park your car to accompany your child into the school, make sure to allow enough time to find a parking place. If you're biking or walking to school, find the safest route and practice it before school starts.

Plan What Will Happen Each Day After School – Will you pick up your child or will s/he attend an after-school program at the school or at another location? If you need after-school care, make arrangements ahead of time. Call BANANAS, 658-0381, for free referrals to after-school programs in your area. See our handouts: *Choosing Schoolage Child Care*, and *What Schoolage Children Need in Child Care*, available at our office, by mail or from our website.

Teach Your Child Practical Skills

Make sure your child knows her first and last name, age, phone number and address. Teach your child how to tie his shoes. If the fine motor skills aren't developed yet, let him wear slip-ons or shoes with Velcro straps. Let your child practice using scissors, holding a pencil the correct way, and using small amounts of glue. Encourage your child to learn how to get dressed and go to the bathroom without help. During the summer, well before school starts,

establish a routine of going to bed and getting up early, dressing, eating a healthy breakfast, and brushing teeth. Practicing these routines will make the first days of kindergarten more relaxed.

What to Expect When School Starts

The Playground – It’s noisy. Sometimes a good-natured ribbing is a natural part of initiating the new kids. Listen to your child’s experiences and try to decide if or when you should intervene. Children should not feel threatened in the yard. You can advise a child with playground anxiety to hang out on the edges in the beginning and try to make a few friends. Parents who are worried about playground safety can talk to the principal about their concerns or volunteer as yard monitors.

The Bathroom – Where is it? When can you go? How do you let the teacher know you have to? The situation is different with different teachers and in each school. Some kindergarten classrooms have “private” bathrooms, but, alas, not all. And while some teachers are more flexible with younger children, others expect visits to the bathroom to be confined to recess and lunchtime. Some shy children choose not to use the school’s bathroom. However, not using the bathroom is unhealthy and can lead to a much worse situation of having an accident at school. Before school starts, visit the bathroom with your child and let her lock and unlock the doors and flush the toilet. Check out the soap, paper dispenser and the trash can.

The Cafeteria – Many kindergartners eat at school. Whether children bring their own lunches or buy them at school, the cafeteria can be noisy and seem chaotic at first. Many school districts strive to provide healthy meals, but corn dogs, chicken nuggets and fries still make regular appearances on the menu – to the delight of many a kid. If you feel there’s room for improvement in the lunchtime fare, take the initiative for change. Get involved at your child’s school and share ideas about how to improve diets at school and at home. You can help set up a school recycling program as well, if your school doesn’t have one yet, so that kids can learn about “where our garbage goes” after lunch.

Solving Problems – Being the parent of a kindergartner requires some detective skills. You will have to sort through your child’s concerns to discover what’s really going on. If your child is especially anxious, talk to the teacher. You may be able to improve upon some situations right away – for example, asking a teacher to be flexible about the bathroom schedule. Another way to address concerns is to volunteer in the classroom (or the yard or cafeteria). Most teachers welcome parent volunteers and if your employer offers a flexible work schedule, you can become more involved in your child’s school. Spending time at school lets you to see firsthand what your child’s day is like. For many

kindergartners, it involves periods of sitting still, listening to the teacher and concentrating on tasks. So make sure your child gets lots of afternoon outdoor exercise and very little television time. Adequate sleep and “downtime” is also very important for young children, especially at the beginning of the school year when they are adjusting to the new school schedule.

If your child has a lot of worries regarding school, offer a sympathetic ear. It might help to remind your child – and yourself – that being new doesn’t last for long and fears usually decrease as situations become more familiar.

Additional Resources

BANANAS has two 30-minute videos that help parents prepare their children for kindergarten. A refundable \$50 deposit is required to check out videos from our office.

“Kindergarten – Here I Am!” (#544, available in Spanish only).

“Ready Or Not – Here I Come: School Readiness” (#543, available in English and Spanish).

Books for Pre-Kindergartners

Annabelle Swift, Kindergartner by Amy Schwartz. Despite initial problems, Annabelle turns her first day of kindergarten into a success.

Countdown to Kindergarten by Alison McGhee. A little girl is nervous about her first day of school because she can’t tie her shoes.

I Am Too Absolutely Small for School by Lauren Child. This humorous book shows how Lola’s older brother allays her fears about starting school.

The Kissing Hand by Audrey Penn. Chester’s mom helps him overcome his kindergarten anxiety by showing him a special way to carry her love with him.

Look Out Kindergarten, Here I Come! by Nancy Carlson. Henry can’t wait for kindergarten but when he gets to school, he’s not so sure he’s ready after all.

Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten by Joseph Slate. This book shows how different animal characters get ready for kindergarten.

My Kindergarten by Rosemary Wells. Bunny heroine Emily goes through her first hundred days of kindergarten. Includes lessons on letters, numbers and science.

