

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The School Year is Here – Is Your Child Ready?

Winston-Salem, NC – July 25, 2005 - The transition from the summer to the start of the new school year can be stressful for children and parents. “The first week of school is an exciting time for most children. However, it can also be laced with anxiety and fear for children who are unsure about new routines, expectations, and peer groups,” explains Elizabeth Hooks an elementary school teacher in Denver, Colorado.

Both parents and teachers should participate in preparing children for the transition back to school. “Many negative fears can be alleviated when children are shown what to expect ahead of time. Through stories, games, and conversations children can develop basic schemas for a typical school day before they walk in the door. This decreases anxiety and opens their cognitive resources for socialization, learning, and other important activities. It really sets the tone for a positive and exciting school year,” suggests Ms. Hooks.

Whether a parent, grandparent, family friend, or teacher, there are a few very simple and fun things you can do to make the start of the school year a successful one:

**Communicate:** Allow children to voice concerns and discuss changes in the upcoming school year such as a new teacher, different classmates, and increased work load. Family and friends should talk about school in a positive way to get children excited about the start of the school year. For educators, send students letters a few weeks before the first day of school to show them you are excited about the year and about having them in your class. Children rarely receive mail, so this personal touch can start the year off right.

**Use Stories:** Reading is a great leisure activity for everyone, especially children. Books stimulate the brain, encourage creativity, and increase vocabulary. They can also be used as a fun way to get ready for the school year by addressing expectations and managing the transition. For example, The Sandbox Learning

([www.sandbox-learning.com](http://www.sandbox-learning.com)) has a variety of online printable books that can be used to help transition kids back to school such as *My Day at School*, *Getting Ready for School*, *Classroom Rules*, *Making Friends*, and *Listening and Following Directions*. These personalizable books address each child's individual needs through customized text and engage children through personalized illustrations. For example, the text in *School Rules* can be customized to include the child's name, teacher's name, and school and classroom rules. The illustrations can be personalized so the main character looks like the child reading the book. Reading this personalized book with your child before school starts sets expectations for behavior in the school and classroom. At the same time the child is engaged because they love seeing themselves in the illustrations and reading their names and other personal information in the text. These stories help make school preparation fun for the child and easy for the parent.

**Visit the School:** Attend the school open house. Meeting the teacher, seeing the classroom, and learning the names of classmates are great ways for children to prepare for the school year. Visiting the classroom can greatly reduce the stress associated with the start of the year. Many teachers use the open house as a fun way to introduce themselves, the classroom, and the expectations for the year. If the school does not have an open house before the first day of school, teachers may have other times for families to visit. If there is no opportunity to see the classroom, drive by the school and discuss where the child gets off the bus, enters the school, and plays during recess. If possible, stop by the school office and see if you can walk through the school. Locate the child's classroom and point out areas like the bathroom, cafeteria, and auditorium. All of us, including children, are more positive, relaxed, and comfortable when we are familiar with our surroundings. Help children start the year happy and relaxed by introducing them to their school and classroom.

**Return to a School Sleeping Schedule:** If children have spent the past few months sleeping in, the early wake up time for school can be a problem. Gradually start waking children up earlier so they can adjust to

the schedule change. Since many children do not like to get up early, be creative and plan fun reasons for getting up like a family pancake breakfast or a trip to the park.

For children starting kindergarten a full day of school can be very difficult, especially for children who still nap. A typical 5 year old sleeps 10-12 hours a day, which for some children includes a 1-2 hour afternoon nap. Many kindergarten classrooms have nap time at the beginning of the year and gradually phase it out. Other classrooms have a break time for kids to read and relax, but do not have a time when children can sleep. The best way to introduce this change at home is to gradually make bedtime earlier and wakeup time earlier, but to eliminate naptime from a child's schedule all at once. Although the child may be irritable at first, completely removing nap time is often less difficult than gradually eliminating it from their schedule.

**Plan In Advance:** There is often a long to do list for going back to school. Going to the doctor for check-ups, buying school supplies and clothes, and registering for school and/or sports teams can create additional stress in our lives. Reduce stress by planning ahead. Schedule an appointment with the pediatrician well in advance of registration in case your child needs additional shots or there is a problem with paperwork.

Purchase school supplies early and recheck the list one week before school starts. Confirm all arrangements for transportation, after school activities, and child care. Life throws everyone too many unexpected things. Head some of them off at the curve with a little advanced planning.

Although everyone has a lot to do these days, help reduce your family's stress throughout the start of the school year with these five strategies: communicate with your children and family, use stories to set expectations and encourage reading, visit the school to familiarize children with their surroundings, return to a school sleeping schedule, and plan ahead. By spending a little extra time preparing for the school year now, everyone will have an easier time throughout the entire school year.

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