

# Give your kids the BEST start ever

© Michael Grose 2008

In a few days most Australian kids will be going to school pre-school or even child-care.

Some children will be **beginning** a new experience. Others will be **returning** to school or child-care after a holiday break. Many will be **changing** from one school to another either as a result of a move or transition to a new level of schooling.

The start of the year is a brilliant opportunity for a new beginning for those who may have struggled last year at school either academically or socially. A clean slate is important for some children and young people.

The new year provides an opportunity for children to grow personally as they need to meet new challenges. Adapting successfully to change or altered circumstances is a basic life skill that we all learned as kids. Some kids do struggle in this area but with parental help they can easily succeed.

Here are ten things that you can do to help get your kids off to the BEST start ever and maximise this time of OPPORTUNITY:

- 1. Pump UP the positives:** Kids react differently to change and new circumstances. The good news is that they tend to take their cues from their parents. So be positive in your language and attitude toward the coming events. If school 'sucks' then point their attention towards the positives – different friends, new activities, fun teacher. Find something positive for them to focus on.
- 2. Be patient:** It takes some kids longer than others to settle, make friends and move into a new routine. If kids are finding things a little tough let them know that things will get better. Resist the temptation to change situations that may not be ideal for your child. Be a supportive parent rather than a rescuer parent. Teach your kids the value of patience.
- 3. Process what happens:** Help children and teens process their new experiences and be willing to fill in the gaps of what they don't see. Kids can be faulty observers forgetting that there maybe two sides to every story; and that there may be good reasons for schools doing what seem to be dumb things to them. Point out the pieces they don't see.
- 4. Play down blowouts:** School and child-care can be tiring for kids as they negotiate new relationships, learn new routines and adjust to new adults so they frequently become tired, grumpy and cantankerous at home. It's hard to be good all day so parents often have to can cop the brunt of their bad stuff for a time.

5. **Work out problems with the school or child-care setting:** Work out the right channels and take any settling in issues to the right people at the right time. Don't be in too much of a hurry though as you need to give kids a chance to settle.
6. **Set up communication:** Establish communication early with your child's teacher, form teacher or carer. Work out the best way to stay in contact with them, being respectful of their time.
7. **Match them with mates:** The big issue for many kids is not what they learn, but who they are friendly with. Social success usually precedes school success so make it easy for them to make friends. Make sure you let them invite a friend around or spend after school time at a new friend's place.
8. **Get them to bed on time:** Kids of all ages get tired at the start of the school year so make sure they get plenty of sleep.
9. **Get them to school on time:** Believe it or not many kids habitually get to school late. Ten minutes a day soon adds up so make getting to school on time a high priority.
10. **Start your home learning routine:** Establish an after school, pre school or even child care centre routine that allows for their recommended learning activities. Be flexible but don't be fooled into having no time for outside class learning such as reading, projects or other learning tasks.

Psychologically, the way a child starts a process will often determine his or her success. Getting off to a good start does make a difference and parents are very much part of this process. So be prepared to focus more of your energies and attention toward children than usual as they settle in at this important time of the year.