

OFF TO SCHOOL

Sending children “off to school” for the first time is not always easy for parents. Although starting school is an exciting and important event in a child’s life, most kids go through an adjustment period during the first few weeks. Whether beginning pre-school or kindergarten, children may suffer from separation anxiety if it’s their first time away from home.

Parents of multiples need to deal with two or more children adjusting to the concept of school at the same time. Most decide to place their children in one classroom initially so that they have the security of each other’s presence. However, multiples may still have a difficult time with starting school if they are not used to being separated from their parents.

So what’s the best way for parents to handle this new phase in their children’s lives? Parents need to provide their kids with extra support in preparing for school and can take certain steps to make the transition from home to school smoother. Listed below are some suggestions:

- Select a school that offers an orientation program where you can stay with your children the first day or week of school. This will allow your children to get comfortable with their new surroundings before they are separated from you.
- Familiarize your children with the idea of going to school by reading books and watching videos about children attending school (Barney’s new “Let’s Play School” video is a good one). In addition, you can also mention names of friends and cousins that are already in school. Encouraging your children to speak with other kids about their experiences in the classroom may also be helpful.
- Introduce your children to activities that will get them used to socializing with others. Although multiples have developed some social skills by playing with their sibling(s), they must also learn how to interact with different children. Playgroups, play centers (Magic Jungle, Playpod, ect.) and playgrounds offer an excellent opportunity for them to gain exposure to other kids.
- Make the concept of school more real to your children. Visit the school playground several times before school begins and show your children the school building. Also, try to describe school activities and what their day will be like. Knowing what to expect ahead of time will make them feel less strange on their first day.
- Take your children on a trial school bus run if they are starting kindergarten and will be riding the bus for the first time. Asking an older child from your neighborhood to sit with your children during the first week of school may also make the bus ride less intimidating.
- Practice taking turns with your children so that they will learn to cooperate. Luckily, most multiples have learned this concept at an early age since they are used to sharing with each other. Parents should still emphasize that they will need to share with their new classmates at school in addition to their sibling(s).
- Say goodbye with a smile even though it may be painful if your children act clingy and start to cry. Attempt to reassure your children that they will have a good time and let them know when you will be picking them up if they are not taking the bus. Your confidence will hopefully rub off on them.

Above all, parents will need patience since it may take several weeks before their children become adjusted to their new school. Fortunately, most kids will eventually view going to pre-school and kindergarten as a positive experience and will be better prepared for elementary school in future years.

Sources:

1. Eisenberg, Mufkoff, & Hathaway. What to Expect the Toddler Years. New York, NY: Workman Publishing, Inc., 1994.
2. Hall, Nancy. “Countdown to Kindergarten.” Parents Magazine, August, 1999, pages 161-162.

3. Israeloff, Roberta. "Take the Scarieness Out of School. Parents Magazine, Sept., 1999, pages 176-183.
4. LaForge, Ann. "Ready for School?" Child Magazine, Sept., 1999, pages 83-85.
5. Salk, Dr.Lee. Familyhood. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Publishing, 1992.

First published September 1999 in "The Duet", Bucks-Mont Mothers of Multiples. All rights reserved to the publication and the author.