

# Starting Primary School

## A Parent Guide for Neurodivergent Children

*Starting primary school is a big milestone. New environments, routines and social expectations can feel exciting and overwhelming all at once. The strategies below help create predictability, build independence and support emotional regulation during this transition.*

### Build Predictability Before Day One

- Visit the school grounds (playground, classroom, toilets, office). You might even be able to do this on a weekend or pupil free day when it's quiet
- Create a simple visual schedule of a school day
- Practise the morning routine at home (now, not starting first day of school!)
- Use photos or drawings to show what will happen
- Ask the teacher if you could pop in to say hi during a pupil free day (just you, not book drop off day)

**Why?** Knowing what to expect reduces anxiety and supports confidence

### Practise Everyday School Skills

- Choose and manage the right backpack and lunch box. See next page 'resources'
- Practise opening food containers and drink bottles
- Practise toileting and handwashing independently
- Practise how to ask to go to the toilet
- Ensure lunch and snack foods are safe, familiar and predictable

**Why?** Independence builds confidence

### Prepare for Social Interaction

- Practise greetings and simple social scripts
- Use social stories to explain school situations
- Discuss with the teacher what your child can do during unstructured times if they need a break or some alone time (especially morning tea and lunch)

**Why?** Social rehearsal and social batteries matter

### Establish Consistent Routines

- Adjust bedtime and morning routines at least a week or two before school starts
- Use countdowns before transitions (e.g. brushing teeth, packing up toys)
- Create simple morning and after school checklists – with your child is best
- Have end of day calm activities ready
- Assess whether you're overscheduled and remember your child will need time to rest and play after a full school day (e.g. extracurricular, therapies)

**Why?** Predictable rhythms reduce stress

### Support Regulation

- Pack a comfort item or family photo
- Practise calming strategies at home
- Name and normalise feelings
- Communicate regulation strategies with the teacher
- If necessary, discuss break options with the teacher

**Why?** Emotional tools prevent overwhelm and help your young person feel safe



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### Partner with the School Team

- Share your child's strengths and support strategies
- Ask about classroom routines
- Request advance notice of changes
- Discuss how you'll communicate with the teacher, and best times (see 'resources')
- Access helpful transition resources if needed

**Why?** Build positive partnerships between home and school

### Plan for Sensory Needs

- Talk about sounds, busy spaces and school bells
- Practise coping strategies in public settings
- Pack helpful tools (earbuds, fidget tool, drink bottle)
- Check school uniforms for comfort (tags, seams, fabric feel)
- Break in shoes and clothing ahead of time
- Speak with the school about reasonable adjustments if needed (for example alternative uniform options, sensory tools, break options)

**Why?** Anticipation and comfort support regulation

### Create an 'About Me' Snapshot

- Put together a short letter or one-page snapshot about your child
- Include strengths, interests, preferred ways to communicate and calming strategies
- Ask your child what they want their teacher to know
- A kindy or daycare educator may have helpful ideas to include

**Why?** Giving your child a voice supports understanding and belonging

### Resources

#### Finding the right school bag:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNvx6-HAfJI>

#### Positive Partnership's 'Working Together' Communication Tool

[www.positivepartnerships.com.au/uploads/Communication-Tool.pdf](http://www.positivepartnerships.com.au/uploads/Communication-Tool.pdf)

#### Starting School social narratives

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/early-learning/transition-to-primary-school-el/starting-school-social-narratives>

