The Transition from Preschool to Primary School

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Dr Mary O'Kane is a Lecturer in Psychology, Early Childhood Studies and Education. Her research interests include childhood transitions; resilience and self esteem and the value of play. She is a regular contributor on the Anton Savage Show on Newstalk, RTE Drivteime, and other local and national radio stations discussing a broad range of parenting issues. She gives public talks on a range of topics related to child mental health and wellbeing, parenting and education. Her books: ***Perfectly Imperfect Parenting: Connection Not Perfection*** and ***Anxious Children in an Anxious World: Facing Fears and Finding Brave*** can be purchased at: www.drmaryokane.ie

Your child is due to start 'big school' in September, and naturally you want to support them in any way you can. Teachers advise that if children have good self esteem, can demonstrate some degree of independence in the classroom, if they have the social skills to interact well with each other and with adults, and the language and communication skills to make known their wants and needs, then teachers can easily teach them the other academic skills they would need to be successful in school.

Prepare your child by talking about school and reading them books about children starting school. Speak positively about school at all times, if you are nervous about them starting school, don't show it!	If your child does not know any other children starting, ask around to see if any children living near you will be in the same class as your child and introduce them prior to school start. Starting school is always easier with a hand to hold!	Give your child jobs to do around the house that can help develop both their independence and confidence in their own abilities. Praise their good work and compliment them on the effort that they put into such tasks.
Allow them opportunities to explore and make mistakes. Spend quality time with your child, find activities that you enjoy to do together, have 10 mins quality time every day.	Try reading sessions with your child, maybe as part of their bedtime routine. Encourage them to take part in the process by turning pages for you, or by asking them questions about what you are reading.	Give them time to discuss their world with you and show them you value their opinions by listening to them. Maybe set aside dinner time as family time where the family sit together and talk about what they did that day.
Help children to develop problem-solving and decision-making skills. Try not to solve problems for them. Help children reflect upon possible solutions – brainstorm!	Allow children to complete tasks themselves – offer minimum support. Encourage persistence, by trying again children learn they can overcome obstacles – scaffold their learning!	General Tip: Mindfulness. Practising breathing exercises daily helps children learn how to relax and calm themselves when they are feeling stressed or anxious.
Worry Stones: A Pebble in my Pocket. Can be kept in their pocket and used in difficult moments, and for children separating, or starting school. Little love heart on their pulse point and on yours!	We cannot promise them that they will never face any challenges. Instead we can promise them that when we are faced with challenges, we will all hold hands, and will get through it together.	Free play is the primary means by which children learn to control their lives, solve problems, get along with peers, and become emotionally resilient. Finally remember: Connection Not Perfection!

Recommended Reading List for Educators / Parents

Recommended books for children about Transition and Separation:

The Invisible String by Patrice Karst.
The Kissing Hand by Audrey Penn
Owl Babies by Martin Waddell
When I Miss You by Cornelia Maude Spelman

Recommended books for Children Starting School:

A Pocketful of Kisses by Angela McAllister [Digby keeps mums kisses in his pocket]
I Am Absolutely Too Small For School [Useful if they are not too keen! Part of the Charlie and Lola series]
Topsy and Tim Start School. [Covers lots of different aspects of what will happen at school]
Harry & The Dianosaurs Go to School [Harry realises he can't bring his toys to school, but ends up enjoying it anyway]
Little Owl's First Day at School [Little Owl is anxious but then decides he likes school]
Alfie and the Big Boys [For any children anxious about the older children in school]
Come to School Too Blue Kangaroo [Lily projects her anxiety about school onto her Kangaroo who has a sore tummy at the thought of school]
Starting School by Janet & Alan Ahlberg [General anxieties and lots of advice]
Little by Little / Puddles Big Step by Amber Stewart and Layn Marlowe
I am Not Very Brave by Timothy Knapman

My No.1 Recommendation for Little Ones on Anxiety: Hey Warrior by Karen Young

Other recommended books:

The Magic Moment by Niall Breslin
Mindfully Me (3 pack of books) by Louise Shanagher
The Truth Pixie by Matt Haig
Wilma Jean the Worry Machine by Julia Cook
What To Do When You Worry Too Much (6-12 years) by Dawn Huebner
What To Do When Your Brain Gets Stuck by Dawn Huebner (great for any little ones concerned about germs after Covid)

Books on Resilience:

Bounce Back Betty by Cindy Whiteside
The Hugging Tree a Story About Resilience by Jill Neimark
Bounce Back: How to be a Resilient Kid by Wendy Moss
My Strong Mind by Niels van Hove
Courage by Bernard Waber
Tomorrow I'll be Brave by Jessica Hische