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## *Entering School*

Even if your child has been in day care or nursery school, the first day of "real" school is an important event often characterized by nervous anticipation. Getting your child off to a good start the first few weeks of school will foster future positive attitudes. If your child is about to start school for the first time, you may find the following suggestions helpful.

- 1. Visit the school a few times before the start of classes.** Become acquainted with the school on the weekend. A big, new school is less intimidating on a quiet Saturday or Sunday. Walk or drive the route your child will take. Explore the playground. Walk around the school, and even look into a window. This helps your child begin to adjust to the new environment. Next, visit the school while it is in session. If possible, let your youngster see the room and meet the teacher. Many schools have orientation sessions.
- 2. Allow your child to feel scared about starting school.** Do not try to dismiss or ignore your child's feelings of apprehension. Point out that children are sometimes scared when they first go off to school because they miss their parents and do not know what to expect. Some children even cry a little at first. Reassure your child that the teacher knows a lot about children, and will take very good care of him or her. Talk about the feelings you had during your first day of school, and emphasize some funny or positive aspect. Finally, if you work outside the home, try to arrange a few extra hours at home during your child's first week.
- 3. Prepare your child at home.** One way to relieve some anxiety is to play school at home. Another way is to talk in specific terms about what will happen. Discuss how your child will get to and from school; what your child is likely to do during the day; what you will be doing while your child is away; and what will happen once school is over for the day. Read books together about other children's school experiences.
- 4. Try not to build too much significance into the first day.** Your child's first day of school is indeed a milestone. Do prepare and provide reassurance, but do not treat it as a world-shaking event. Your child will approach the first day of school with less apprehension if it is treated as a normal part of everyday life.
- 5. Do not force your child to participate.** Allow your child to become accustomed to the new sights and surroundings by observing rather than participating directly; your youngster is likely to resist if you push too hard.
- 6. Make your good-byes short and visible.** If you do take your child to the classroom, do not try to sneak away while your youngster is in the midst of a classroom activity. Always say good-bye. Regardless of where you say good-bye, try to act casual and upbeat. If your child protests remain calm but state firmly that there is no other choice, and you have faith in your child's ability to start and remain in school.

*Adapted from Donna Warner Manczak, Ph.D., M.P.H.*