



## **Student Wellbeing**

### **What to expect when your child starts school**

It is likely that starting school will be the most significant change your child will have gone through in their short life so far. Consequently, this can affect how they behave, their mood, and how they interact with others. Knowing what to expect in advance can help parents better manage their children's behaviour and reduce parents' concern overall regarding their child.

#### **1. Fatigue and Sleep**

Preps often find their first year of school extremely tiring, particularly Term 1 as they become accustomed to school life, and have to manage the heat. Not only are the children learning the routine and structure of school, they are also making new friends, getting to know an entire school community, and learning their academic curriculum. This can make the children very tired, which in turn can lead to tantrums, tears and behavioural issues at home.

It is extremely important that your child has enough sleep to be able to cope from day to day. At this age, it is recommended that children have between 10-12 hours of sleep per day, obviously with some variations. It can be helpful to bring your child's bedtime forward half an hour to help them settle and gain a full night's rest, until they seem to be coping better. Then you can return to their previous bedtime. It is also important, as with earlier years, to have a regular bedtime ritual that encourages relaxation and sleep. Your child will have had such a mentally stimulating day, that they may need more time than normal to wind down, so it helps to factor this into your nightly routine.

#### **2. Emotional Distress**

Some children are excited to be starting school, happily giving Mum and Dad a kiss on day one and settle seamlessly into school life. However, please take heart to know that this is the exception and not the norm. Most children will experience some kind of emotional distress during their first year of school. This is often a normal reaction to the changes in their environment. Particularly in Term 1, many parents notice that their children come home from school teary, throwing tantrums again, having emotional outbursts at times when they wouldn't normally, or they can become quite arrogant and inconsiderate of others.

Children at this age aren't equipped with enough self-awareness or communicative ability to be able to tell their parents why they are behaving this way. They simply feel bad and then act it out. While it is important to be aware of what might be underlying your child's behaviour, it is still important to maintain firm, loving boundaries. The reason children in Prep often experience emotional distress is because they feel overwhelmed. Setting limits and boundaries in a firm, loving way help children feel safe and secure, and keep families running in a healthy, functional way. While it may be tempting to let them 'get away with it' because of their circumstances,

ultimately it is not in the child's best interest. I suggest you share and talk to other prep parents about it. More than likely you will find that they are experiencing similar behaviour with their child.

### **3. Separation Anxiety**

Many children will experience some form of separation anxiety as they start school. Separation anxiety is when a child feels anxious, fearful or worried about being separated from a caregiver, usually the primary caregiver. Even for children who have attended formal daycare or kindergarten, the commencement of school can still trigger some separation anxiety. Each child is different but children can often wake in the morning complaining of a 'sore tummy', feel teary before school, refuse to get dressed or refuse to let go of mum or dad's hand at the door.

Here at GPS, we have handled this many, many times before so I would encourage you to speak to one of our staff if you have some concerns or issues. Even though watching your child go through separation anxiety can be very difficult, it is in the best interest of your child to be positive, matter of fact about going to school, and to convey that you believe they can cope with this.

### **4. Social Interaction and After School Activities**

Don't be alarmed if your child says that they didn't play with anyone today. At this age children often still parallel play (play alongside each other as opposed to with each other). Your child may have been playing a game on their own, while surrounded by other Preppies. At playtime, our teachers encourage the children to play together in the Prep area and remain out in the playground with them until they are well settled into playing in the yard. It takes the children a while to start engaging fully in playing together.

Settling into a new school and making new friends is a huge task, so it is often recommended to keep after school activities to a minimum. The day alone will often exhaust the Preps, and when they come home they will need to relax and unwind. It is good to have a regular after school routine, with minimal stimulation, that then moves into a night time routine. For any suggestions of a helpful after school routine please speak to Jill or a member of our staff.

#### **Tips to prepare for school:**

- Develop a stable afternoon/nightly routine now, so this is not another new experience for them at the beginning of the year.
- As much as is in your control, minimise any change in family circumstances. The less change the better as your child starts Prep.
- Start encouraging your child to dress independently, praising them for their efforts.
- Ensure that your child knows how to put on and take off shoes and socks. If your child cannot tie shoelaces, then try Velcro fastening shoes instead.
- Make sure that your child can toilet themselves independently. Remind them that they will not get in trouble for asking the teacher if they can go to the toilet.
- Start talking about school now, enquire what they would like in their lunchbox, draw pictures of how they imagine school to be, and reminisce about your own positive experiences of school.
- Ensure that your child knows how to ask an adult for help when they need it.