

What ELSE in your Preschooler's Backpack?

(It's more than just pencils and crayons!)



Beginning a new school year or returning back to childcare after time away can be overwhelming for young children and often includes changes in routines. While your preschooler may feel excited to go to school, she may also feel nervous or worried. At the start, and even throughout the year, most children feel some level of stress.

Social emotional learning can help children adjust to changes in the care routine, including learning ways to make friends, face new challenges, and solve problems. When children have the emotional support and skills to cope with different feelings and changes, they are better prepared to learn in the classroom.

Think of your child's brain and body as an "invisible backpack" that holds and helps carry tools for success like the skills mentioned above. You, alongside other important adults in your child's life, can continue to help fill the backpack!

Growing and learning together:

Fill your child's backpack with these social and emotional skills for a great school year!

Happy thoughts

Helping children practice ways to be calm, flexible, and positive can encourage children to listen to their feelings and listen to others without judgment.

Skills for life: Children and adults with these skills can calmly work through a problem to find an answer.

How to build these skills and help them grow:

- Practice patience. Have your child wait for things when it is appropriate. When she is waiting, help her find ways to stay busy and engaged. *It will be a few minutes until it is our turn in line. What game can we play while we wait?*
- Help your child think of more than one way to solve a problem. *That is one way to get the toys back on the shelf. What other way could we try?*
- Stomp out negative words and thoughts. When you hear your child say, "I can't" or "That will never work" or "I'm no good at this", help him see the positive side. Try new words like "I can try" or "Here is another way" or "I am still learning".

Kind words

Learning and practicing ways to respond kindly and honestly supports children in becoming effective communicators.

Skills for life: Children and adults with these skills are honest and develop friendships they enjoy over time.

How to build these skills and help them grow:

- Model kind words and look for ways to demonstrate helpful and kind behavior.
- Help your child understand why telling the truth matters. *When I tell you something, I want you to know it is true. When you tell me something, I want to believe it is true. This is how we learn together to believe each other's words!*
- Encourage kind habits. *What might we do in this moment that could add kindness to the situation?*

For Parents of Children
ages 3-5



Helping hands

Teaching children to ask for help and help others shows them ways to use their voice and get their needs met.

Skills for life: Children and adults with these skills will try new things and ask for help when needed. They will look for ways to help others.

How to build these skills and help them grow:

- Find ways for your child to help — support her to match socks, fill cups with water, set the table, feed a pet, water the plants, clean up a mess. Talk about how she is being helpful. Talk about how the person being helped feels too! *I loved having your help with dinner tonight. You washed the carrots and helped me make dinner faster. I felt calm and had fun cooking with you. Thank you!*
- Ask questions to help your child work through challenges. *What is another way you could try it?*
- Encourage your child to ask for help when needed.

Safe steps

Identifying rules for children and teaching ways to be safe, a good listener, and how to use their voice to speak up, supports developing healthy boundaries and limit setting.

Skills for life: Children and adults with these skills can follow rules and get along with others. They can also speak up when things do not seem correct or comfortable.

How to build these skills and help them grow:

- Talk with your child about why rules are in place and how they keep your child safe. You can also talk about rules at home, in the community, and at childcare.
- Practice listening to each other and share back what your child says to see if you can help him say even more. *"You found bugs on your class walk! Tell me more!"*
- Talk with your child about standing up for himself and others in respectful ways. Together, practice how to tell someone they hurt your feelings or how to choose a different activity when you weren't enjoying the other.

Easing the transition between home and school

Meet childcare providers and friends:

Schedule a meeting with the childcare provider — in person or virtually — and ask to tour the program and classroom if possible. Connect with children at a playground on the weekend. If possible, have a photo of classmates to help connect childcare stories with new friends.

Create a routine:

Talk about how your family will go from home to school or child care each day, and then back again. Some children may enjoy having the same way to say goodbye and hello each day, such as a special song, hug, or handshake. You might also start reading a book together before the transition each day and finish it after childcare or offer your child a small object to keep in a cubby through the day to remind him of home and your time together.

Expect some bumps:

At times, your child may say "my belly hurts" or "I don't feel good" which can be due to having strong feelings about trying something new and different. Talk about it together to better understand the difference between feelings (ex: feeling sad feels different than feeling lonely).

Build a problem-solver:

Notice your child's feelings and talk about ways to get through hard moments. "Tell me more about how you're feeling." "It's OK to feel that way." "I understand you are worried." "Let's talk about what we might do next."

Useful Websites and Sources:

Ideas for parents and caregivers, as well as behaviors to expect from children <https://zerotothrive.org/transition-back-to-childcare/>

How to help your child handle back-to-school anxiety and fears <https://childmind.org/article/back-to-school-anxiety-during-covid/>

Tips for back to school with preschoolers, including a back-to-school plan you can create together <https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/how-to-help-your-child-successfully-transition-back-to-school>

