

Experts' tips on preparing children for P1

1 Set healthy routines

Ms Jean Koh, assistant director of Circle of Care, a programme to help young children from low-income families, encourages parents to build healthy habits and routines.

- Introduce habits such as sleeping and waking earlier, and counting money to buy food for recess.
- Have fixed times for meals, play and sleep; teach your child how to pack his or her bag according to the school timetable and share with him or her what to expect the next day.

Dr Geraldine Teo-Zuzarte, director of English curriculum in child development at NTUC First Campus, says setting up a timetable will help children predict what will happen each day as well as after school.

Parents can also take a few trips to and from school to familiarise their child with the time needed to get ready.

2 Help your child manage emotions

"Navigating their emotions and communicating their needs is important. This will help children to seek help when required and also help them build friendships with their peers," says Ms Koh.

- Help your child to label his or her emotions and feelings. Use simple words he or she can understand, such as happy, sad or angry.
- Discuss incidents that happened to your child and how they made him or her feel. Talk about the ways your child can respond when having negative emotions.
- Use storybooks or pictures that link to incidents in your child's life to help him or her relate.
- Focus on affirming your child's effort and progress and avoid comparing him or her with others.

3 Build strong bonds

Having healthy relationships with parents can help children develop good social and emotional skills, so that they can build and sustain friendships, says Ms Koh.

- Set aside time daily to give the child your full attention without distractions.
- Listen respectfully when your child wants to tell you about something happy or sad, and show interest in conversations about topics he or she is eager to talk about.
- Talk about changes that will come with going to Primary 1, such as what happens in school.
- At the end of each day, ask specific questions about how your child is feeling instead of a generic "How was your day?". Examples of such questions include "What made you happy today?" or "Did anything make you upset today?".

4 Develop independence

Dr Teo-Zuzarte says parents can involve their child in getting ready for school, for example, in buying a school bag, choosing a water bottle or labelling items so the child feels he or she is a part of the process.

She recommends "helping children with becoming independent as well as building a sense of responsibility towards their own belongings and tasks", adding that the young ones will need to be able to take instructions and directions for homework and projects, for instance.

- Have a notebook for your child to write or draw what he or she needs to prepare for the next day as this develops ownership and accountability.
- Let children practise carrying their own bags and water bottles on family outings so they have a sense of responsibility.

Amelia Teng

Circle of Care is holding a webinar on Wednesday on supporting transitions to primary school. It is a joint programme between non-profit organisation Care Corner Singapore, Lien Foundation and Quantedge Foundation. It supports the development of children from low-income families from the ages of two to nine. Admission to the webinar is free, and the public can apply at tinivur.com/cocwebinar0912