

F: School Years

Getting Ready for Kindergarten when Your Child Has Special Needs

Starting school is a big step in every child's life. Parents are often anxious about sending their child to school for the first time. This milestone can be especially stressful for the parents of a child with special needs. You may be feeling scared, sad, excited or even relieved!

There are a number of things you can do to ease the transition into school. Here are a few tips:

1. Decide which school board your child will be attending. You may want to find out more about the school and school board philosophies on inclusion if you are undecided. Prepare a list of questions.
2. Register your child for kindergarten at your neighbourhood school (the school that is closest to your home). You will need to bring proof of age (Birth Certificate); proof of address (realty tax bill or phone bill), proof of immunization and proof of Citizenship or Permanent Resident Card. Catholic schools will require proof of baptism (Baptismal Certificate).
3. Request a meeting with the Principal and/or Vice-Principal to share information about your child's special support needs. Do not wait until the beginning of the school year to discuss your child's needs.
4. Prepare a list of questions and information you would like to discuss and share with the school. Remember to include things like your child's diagnosis, accessibility needs, communication skills, safety, support services, equipment use and storage. (See the OAFCCD website for information on creating an "All About Me" booklet).
5. Prepare your "All About Me" booklet, which includes up-to-date information about your child which you can refer to and take along with you to your meeting. Don't forget to include a picture of your child! You may leave a copy of this document with the Principal to share with school staff so as they can better understand your child's strengths and needs. You can also create a smaller, less detailed, "All About Me" flyer that you can give to all professionals that will be working with your child.
6. If you are receiving services from the Preschool Speech and Language Program or other community services, talk to your staff contact about transition planning. They will have information about the transition to school and will be able to help you. They may be able to attend meetings with school staff with you.
7. Attend Kindergarten Registration or Information evening as offered by local school boards, usually in January, February or March. Call your local school to get scheduled dates or check the school board website.

8. Create an information binder about your child. (See the OAFCCD website for information on creating a “Parent Resource Binder”). Add information to your Parent Resource Binder including; assessments, reports, information, helpful articles, handouts, etc.
9. Contact agencies, associations or support groups that are specific to your child’s disability as they can provide you with information and resources about your child’s disability and may help ease your child’s transition process into school. (See the “OAFCCD website “Community Resource” for more information.)
10. Remember – **you** are the expert on your child. Share successful strategies and interventions, and be sure to offer insights into your child’s behaviour, likes, dislikes, talents and needs. You know what your child is good at and when he/she will need help.
11. *Find out more about parent workshops or information sessions in your community. Check with Preschool organizations like, Preschool Speech and Language Program, EarlyON Centres, Children’s Treatment Centres or Community Associations.*
12. The Ministry of Education has a document called, **Planning Entry to School, A Resource Guide** that is available on their Website at: www.edu.gov.on.ca This guide includes tips on planning for students with special needs.
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/planningentry.html>