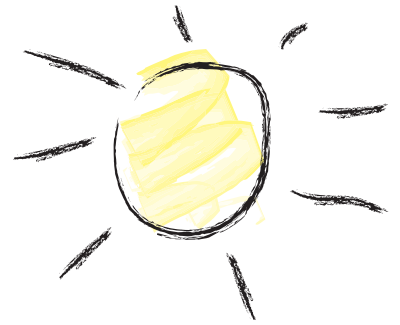


Settling Your Child in School

*A Parent's
Guide*

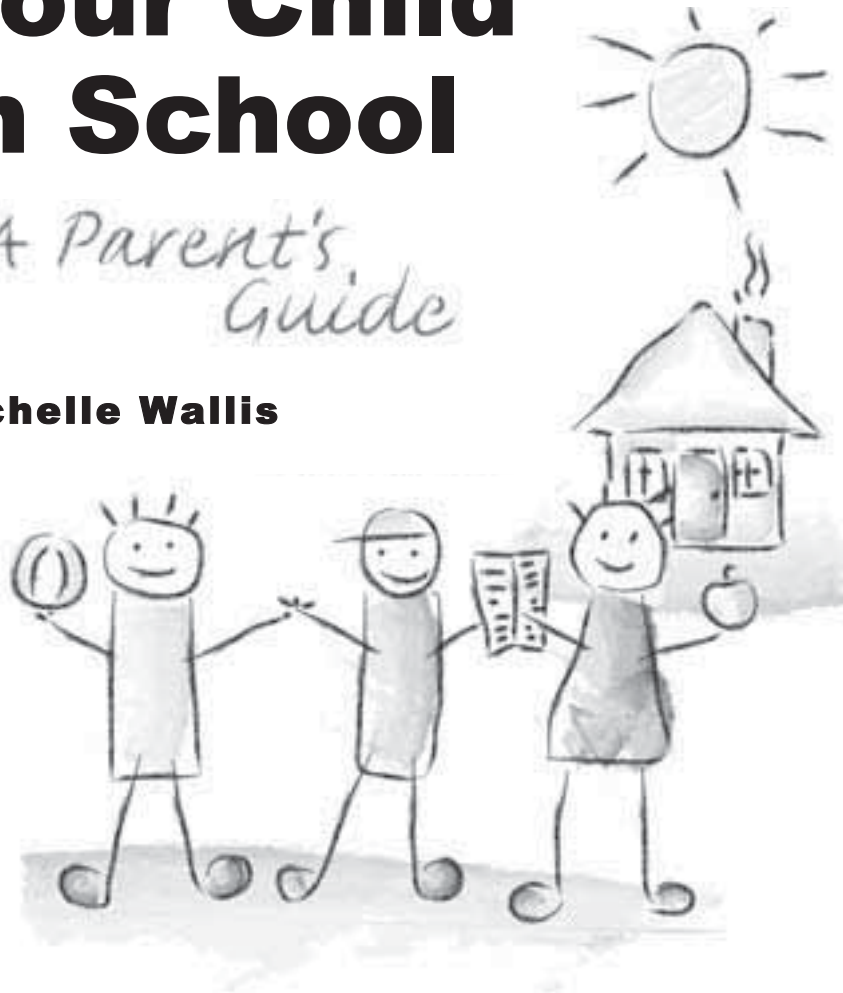


Michelle Wallis

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Crown House Publishing Limited
www.crownhouse.co.uk

First published in 2003 by
Pascal Press
PO Box 250
Glebe NSW 2037
(02)8585 4044
www.pascalpress.com.au
Original ISBN: 1 877085 99 5

Publisher: Vivienne Petris Joannou
Editor: Christine Eslick
Photos by Brand X, Corbis, Eyewire and PhotoDisc

This UK edition published by
Crown House Publishing Ltd
Crown Buildings, Bancyfelin, Carmarthen, Wales, SA33 5ND, UK
www.crownhouse.co.uk

and

Crown House Publishing Company LLC
4 Berkeley Street, 1st Floor, Norwalk, CT 06850, USA
www.CHPUS.com

© *Pascal Press, Australia, 2003, 2005*
This edition not for sale outside UK, EU or US

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British Library of Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue entry for this book is available from the British Library.

International Standard Book Number
1904424503

Library of Congress Control Number
2004111448

Printed and bound in the UK by
Cromwell Press, Trowbridge, Wiltshire

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Introduction

My decision to write this book came out of my own personal experience of frustration and the lack of information available to me when my daughter began primary school and began to experience a sense of failure. She was, and still is, a terrific girl. She was bright and funny and great with people, but when she started school something happened that changed all that.



Suddenly, she was no longer the shining star. Suddenly, she was expected to do things at a particular time, in a particular way, and exactly as she was told. Suddenly, she didn't know all the answers, and she would refuse to guess at them for fear of being wrong.

There were a number of things that contributed to my daughter's sense of failure and the on-going struggle she has with her confidence. First, there was the fact that I had no idea she was feeling this way. As a parent, I had assumed she would go to school and learn to read and write and do maths. She would cope just fine because she had gone to preschool and she'd been fine there—there'd been no suggestion that she needed another year at preschool.

Although I hadn't explicitly taught her to read, she knew all about books and loved them just as I do. She wasn't writing when she started school, but she could certainly colour and draw. She knew her ABC—sang it all the time, counted everything and was very social and friendly. I was a school teacher at this time and felt she would do very well at school. She was ready for school, wasn't she?

I have learnt a lot since then. I wanted to see what schools were doing in the areas of reading, writing and arithmetic. As a teacher, I steadily became aware that there was a 'gap' between preschool and the beginning of school. School is different from preschool.

Schools try to prepare parents and children as best they can, and they provide information directly to those who can make it to the familiarisation day, or through brochures and information booklets. Most children do fine, because they are so keen to learn and are eager to please parents, teachers and friends. Some, though, need a little more help to cross that gap, and all can benefit from knowing more rather than less when they start school.

I don't claim to have all the answers, and I cannot guarantee your child's instant success at school. What I have put together is a series of questions, ideas, suggestions and information that I hope you will be able to put to good use to help your child across the gap and into the joy of learning and school.

3 Gross motor skills

What are gross motor skills?

Gross motor skills are all the broad and large movements we are able to perform. As babies, we have little or no control of our bodies, and we gradually develop motor control (control of our muscles). First, we are able to perform very broad movements like swinging an arm in the direction we want to, and then we work up to a level where we can pick up a tiny button from the floor and put it on to a pile of buttons without knocking them over.

Your child should practise large movements to get ready for finer movements later. These gross motor activities will increase muscle tone and motor control.

Make sure your child gets plenty of practice at:

- running
- jumping
- crawling
- catching
- kicking
- throwing
- tipping
- rolling
- hopping
- waving
- clapping
- skipping
- climbing
- swinging

5 Learning styles

Each and every person has their own particular style. We each have very different likes and dislikes. The same is true for the way we like to learn.

Visual learners

Some people prefer to have the information presented in a visual way. The information can be presented in written material in books, on posters or on a blackboard.

These learners take information from:

- maps
- pictures
- posters
- information sheets
- video and television.

Auditory learners

Others prefer to learn in an auditory way—the information is told to them. They learn best from hearing the information, or by associating it with sounds and rhythm. These people often have a strong ‘musical’ interest also.

Auditory learners prefer to learn the information from:

- songs
- speaking

- chants
- rhymes
- radio programs
- music
- rhythmic ways.

Kinaesthetic learners

Still others need kinaesthetic information to learn. They need to 'do' the task to learn it, to physically act it out by moving around the room and placing their body in particular ways. This style of learning involves processing the particular position of the body, or the way the body needs to move in order to succeed.

These learners prefer to:

- act out the information, story or problem
- learn by doing the activity
- hold things
- feel things
- touch things
- taste things.

Covering all the bases

Most people will be strong in one style of learning. They might learn best from visual information but if the material is presented in an auditory way that does not mean they will not learn anything. It only means that they might have found it easier and quicker to learn from a map than from hearing about India.

When teaching a new skill to anyone it is best to cover all bases. Try to make sure you present the new information in a visual way and an

- Provide a lot of different textures and experiences of the learning.
- Use colours and tastes to add to the experience.
- Remember to play at everything your child is learning. It will help them to remember what they have learnt.

Checklist for learning styles*

Your child's learning style	Yes/No
1 (a) Does your child like maps?	
(b) Does your child enjoy picture books?	
(c) Does your child watch others and mimic them?	
(d) Does your child enjoy computer games?	
(e) Does your child like to draw and copy others' pictures?	
2 (a) Does your child enjoy music?	
(b) Does your child learn the words of songs easily?	
(c) Does your child enjoy rhythmic chants and games?	
(d) Can your child mimic you exactly when speaking?	
(e) Does your child like to talk about what they are doing?	
3 (a) Does your child show a preference for physical games?	
(b) Does your child prefer to move than to sit still?	
(c) Does your child want to smell and taste things a lot?	
(d) Does your child prefer touching things to just looking?	
(e) Does your child like to act out stories they are telling you?	

*Answers to questions

1 (a)–(e) mostly yes = visual learner

2 (a)–(e) mostly yes = auditory learner

3 (a)–(e) mostly yes = kinaesthetic learner

8 Reading

It is not essential that your child be able to read a book from beginning to end when they begin school. However, it is important that they be aware that books exist and that there are particular things we do with books.

- Read with your child: teach your child which way up the book goes.
- Talk about the stories you read. Let your child know how stories go.
- Share your love of reading to inspire your child to read too.



Reading behaviours

- Let your child see and hear you read regularly. Read for your own pleasure as well as reading to your child.
- If you are not too self-conscious, 'doing the voices' is a great way to get your child involved in the story.
- Show your child how you read. Trace under the words you are reading with your finger. Ensure that your child is aware that reading is done from left to right.
- Make books and reading a part of your daily life. Take time to snuggle on the couch and share a book. Read at bedtime.

- Join the local library and let your child borrow books too. This cuts the cost of reading down considerably, as well as exposing your child to a whole host of people who read.
- Encourage and support any ‘reading-like’ behaviours your child does on their own (e.g. holding the book and turning the pages, running a finger under the words, making up their own story from the pictures, using book language like ‘once upon a time’).
- Talk about the book before you start to read it. Look at the cover and try to guess what the story might be about. Talk about the title and how it gives clues to the story.
- Most importantly, talk about the stories you read. Stop in the middle and ask what your child thinks might happen. Help them explain why they think that might happen. The story has all the clues: use the pictures and keep going back to the story. Teach your child to be a thinking reader, to guess ahead: it’s the true joy of reading.
- When you finish a story, talk about what the ‘best part’ was. Ask questions and talk about your own reaction to the story. Tell your child what you found funny, sad, interesting and so on.

If your child is already involved in stories and books then they are ready for the next phase.







Learning about the sound–symbol relationship

It’s not as intellectual as that makes it sound. Learning about the sound–symbol relationship means developing the understanding that each letter in the alphabet stands for a particular set of sounds. For example, the letter ‘A’ makes a long sound like the name of the letter in the word ‘able’ and a shorter sound as in the word ‘apple’.

When we see the letter ‘A’ in writing, we understand that it will make one of these sounds in relationship with the other letters. Your child does not need to know all that. (You probably don’t want to either!) It’s enough that you begin making your child aware that each letter makes a sound.

Is your child ready for their first year of school?

Settling Your Child in School is a comprehensive guide to helping your child cross the gap between pre-school and school containing helpful information on:

-  What your child needs to know about starting school
-  How to settle your child in the school environment
-  The mental and physical abilities your child will need at school
-  How schools approach classroom learning
-  Helping your child with reading, writing and number skills at home
-  Games and activities to stimulate your child's interest in learning

Learn what schools expect of children so your child can enjoy their first school experience.

"...a godsend, detailing practical, fun things to do to aid the transition from nursery to infants school."

Dr Ian Porter, parent, Scotland

"Lots of helpful practical information to help both parent and child ...indispensable."

Denise Roberts, Publishing Director, Parental Eye Magazine

"...excellent tips, easy to follow checklists and great ideas for setting and achieving goals with your child."

Rian Furlong, parent, Wales

Michelle Wallis conducts regular seminars for parents to help them prepare their children for school. She has developed this guide from both her teaching experience and the experiences of her own children.



Crown House Publishing Limited
www.crownhouse.co.uk

Cover design Tom Fitton

Parenting
UK £6.99 US \$12.95
ISBN 190442450-3



9 781904 424505