

Back-to-School: Understanding the Basics

A new school year brings new routines, new people, and new opportunities. These tips can help you and your child feel more prepared and confident. Small steps now can make a big difference all year long!

Get Organized Before School Starts

You will receive many important papers throughout the school year—IEPs, evaluations, report cards, progress reports, and notes from school. Keeping everything together helps you stay organized and ready for meetings or questions. Being organized can also help reduce stress throughout the school year. When important records are easy to find, you'll feel more prepared for parent-teacher conferences, IEP meetings, evaluations, and other conversations with your child's school team. A little organization now can save time and frustration later.

Know Your Child's Plan

The IEP is the foundation of your child's education. Before the school year begins, take a few minutes to read through your child's IEP or 504 Plan. It has probably been several months since your last meeting, and it's easy to forget some of the supports the team carefully planned. Reviewing the plan before school starts can help you feel more prepared to answer questions, monitor your child's progress, and recognize when supports are working well. As you read, make note of any questions or concerns you would like to discuss with your child's teacher or IEP team.

If you find yourself wondering what something in the IEP means, how a support will look during the school day, or what questions you should ask at your next meeting, South Dakota Parent Connection is here to help. We can explain the special education process, answer your questions, and help you become a more confident partner in your child's education.

Build Positive Communication

Good communication with your child's school makes a big difference. Keep a communication log to track calls, emails, and meetings. Share helpful information with teachers and consider providing a one-page introduction so staff can quickly get to know your child's strengths, interests, and successful supports. Remember that communication is a two-way partnership. Share information about what works well for your child at home and ask teachers how things are going at school. When parents and educators share ideas and work together, children often benefit from more consistent support both at home and at school.



Parent Tips

After the fun and freedom of summer, returning to school can feel like a big change. These ideas may help your child adjust more easily and feel ready for success.

- **Prepare for New Routines** - Start adjusting bedtimes, morning routines, and screen time a little at a time before school begins. Talk about what the school day will look like. Some children benefit from visual schedules, calendars, or social stories. Returning to a routine takes time. If your child seems tired or frustrated during the first few weeks, that's okay. Be patient, keep routines as consistent as possible, and celebrate progress as your child settles into the school year
- **Become Familiar with School** - If your school offers an open house, orientation, or classroom visit, consider attending. Seeing the school, meeting teachers, and practicing how your child will get to school each day can help your child feel more comfortable with new people, places, and routines. If visiting the school isn't possible, look at pictures on the school's website, drive by the building, or talk about what your child can expect during the school day. Knowing what to expect can help ease worries and build confidence.
- **Practice New Skills** - Practice packing a backpack, opening lunch containers, finding classrooms, using a locker, riding the bus, or following a morning routine. Rehearsing everyday school skills ahead of time builds confidence.
- **Support Independence** - Give your child opportunities to make choices, solve small problems, and complete age-appropriate tasks independently. Celebrate each success. Small steps lead to greater independence over time.
- **Build Confidence for the First Day** - Returning to school can bring excitement and nervous feelings at the same time. Let your child know it is okay to feel unsure. Celebrate small successes, encourage your child to ask for help when needed, and remind them that new routines take practice.

Every child adjusts to a new school year in their own way. Some children settle in quickly, while others need a little more time and encouragement. By preparing ahead, looking for signs that your child is growing and celebrating those successes, and working together with your child's school, you are helping build a strong foundation for a successful year.

South Dakota Parent Connection is Here to Help!

We offer free support, information, and resources to families across South Dakota.



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