

Preparing your child for school



By S. George, Secondary teacher.

In the year before they begin school, talk to them about the many things that will help them to be independent of you. Praise them for what they can do, giving them the confidence that they will be able to enjoy school, to be an independent “bigger” person and to know when to ask for assistance.

- Have high expectations - that they will at least do what peers of the same age do.
- Encourage them to be inquisitive and ask questions, create and explore.
- Ensure their basic safety, but let them be free to try things and make mistakes.
- Model and encourage reading and story telling (read to them too, or use audio books).
- Discuss how and when to use vision aids – glasses, domes or magnifiers (several types for different purposes). Encourage them to tell others about this (the beginning of advocacy).
- Have them organise their belongings and plan their routines or activities, so that they know where things are and what they are doing.
- Ensure they have basic movement skills – other children learn these by watching others (to climb, jump, skip, hop, throw, catch, hit) but yours may need explicit teaching.
- Talk to them about social skills, things they may miss because of low vision, in a way that normalises this for them. How to listen for direction and expression in the voice, choice of words, to look at someone if they are speaking to you. Personal space and how to join a group conversation. How to ask others to explain what is going on or what the conversation is about if they are unsure.
- Encourage self-advocacy, starting at home – how to explain to others what they see, and how others can assist them to know what is going on - in a positive way. How to ask for help when it is needed and at the same time let others know how they cope and what they can do.
- Connect with other parents of children with low vision or albinism, to share information and give each other support.
- Connect with organisations that may be a source of advice and practical assistance.
- Ensure you have orientation and mobility (O&M) support and advice (for both child and school). Have them take their cane every time you go out, using it in unfamiliar areas where possible, rather than always holding your hand.
- Visit the school in the year before. Speak to the staff about visiting when other children are not there and also attend open or orientation days.
- Work toward independence in learning (don't do what they can do for themselves or do less because of their vision).