

# Old school - new school

Whether starting school for the first time, or returning as 'old-hands', the new school year brings a mix of excitement and trepidation for both kids and parents alike. This month our columnists, **Carol Duncan** and **Chris Howe**, tell us two very different stories as they prepare for their kids' 2011 school adventures.



## BACK-TO-SCHOOL CHECKLIST

In order to ease into the new school year - especially for first timers - the Department of Employment and Training NSW has prepared a "Time to Start School" resource booklet. Some of the hints contained in the booklet are relevant to returning students as well. For more details visit [www.schools.nsw.edu.au](http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au)

### The week before

- Write your child's name on everything!
- Make sure you have the school's phone number.
- If you have a son, make sure he knows how to use a urinal.

### The night before the first day

- Lay out your child's clothes, shoes and socks.
- Make your child's recess and lunch and pop it in the fridge.
- Help your child to pack their school bag.
- Pack a spare pair of underpants, socks and a change of clothes in a plastic bag. Let your child know these are in their back pack in case they have any toilet accidents at school.

### The first day

- Be confident about the first day with your child.
- Let your child dress themselves as much as possible.
- Tie back long hair or plait hair.
- Apply sunscreen and take a hat.
- Take photos!
- Pick up your child on time.

## JOIN THE DISCUSSION!

Is your child starting school this year? Or returning as an 'old hand'? How did their first day go? Visit [www.sunnydaysmagazine.com.au](http://www.sunnydaysmagazine.com.au) and join the discussion.



## mum said...

My two boys are back to school with eleventy-nine pairs of new grey socks because apparently all the old grey socks are

'flopplers'. Mr 9 is heading into Year 4 and Mr 7 into Year 3 - no more infants for him, he's a big boy now!

I don't tend to do a lot of worrying, certainly not about the things that are within my control. But one of the great realisations of parenting for me has been how becoming a parent makes you vulnerable. More than I ever imagined.

Mr 7 was born with a serious congenital heart defect - all very terrifying at the time but, to cut a long story short, he was beautifully and completely 're-plumbed' and is now 'just like a bought one', as my father would say. But I was terribly worried when he started school. Worried that SOMETHING

might happen to him. I wasn't entirely sure what, just something. And nothing good.

Mr 9, on the other hand, has always been the picture of health - tall, long-limbed, tawny-skinned and, unlike his little brother, not quite as accident prone. Of course I cried the day Mr 9 started school, but I think we all do that. Don't we? (Say: 'Yes Carol'.)

Back to school for 2011 and we have another little challenge. After what seemed a minor incident on Christmas Eve, it would appear that Mr 9 also has an issue with his heart. Completely different to Mr 7 (and although as yet officially undiagnosed it should be much easier to deal with) but no less worrying. Mr 7 was plumbing, Mr 9 is electrical.

So this year, my beautiful boys are heading back to school with eleventy-nine pairs of grey socks and a shared cardiologist. Mr 9 used to express a slight envy whenever Mr 7 had a day off school for his annual cardiac check-up, I so dearly hope that this year my greatest concern will be trying to get them appointments on the same day!

But you know what? We're lucky. As a journalist I hear of and share so many stories with the audience that make me laugh, make me cry, shock or horrify me, inspire me and encourage me. I regularly interview people who have been through things that I just can't begin to imagine, let alone imagine how I might manage should I be in their shoes. I hope this gives me true perspective.

So heading into the 2011 school year, I'm looking forward to Mr 7 and Mr 9 coming home with or without hats, with various limbs grazed, smooshed bananas in the bottom of their bags and the bum ripped off their pants - hopefully only on days that they do actually wear underpants. They're boys, I can only control so much.

**Carol is a journalist and presenter with ABC Local radio in Newcastle. She is the mother of two boys - Alexander, 9, and James 7 - and claims to have no idea what she'd have done had she had a 'pink one', but assumes that even dainty girl-children do armpit farts. She loves bedtime.**



## dad said...

For five years I've maintained a quiet confidence regarding my ability to raise a child by the method of, well, pretty

much leaving them alone. I'm not saying I'm not an involved parent, but I haven't forced anything onto my children - other than Rabbitoh's jerseys, ukuleles and the occasional push out the back door. For me, the goal pre-pre-school was for my firstborn, Jas, to have a childhood, not a daily task plan.

Jas, now five and a half, is an active, curious child. She's been jumping out of her skin for the last six months to go to 'big school'. Despite the fact that we have never actively sought to foist literacy upon her, she knows her alphabet, will happily copy out any writing she sees and can write her name and address from memory. And, thanks to Snakes and Ladders, she can count to one hundred quite well.

As free-range parents, people often assume we are anti-education because we are anti-

pressure. However, my wife and I want Jas to like school. She eats her breakfast. She's even somewhat obedient. You'd think she was a gold-pressed-ready-for-school child.

Well I certainly thought so, until I attended five days of orientation at the local primary school: "Make sure she can read. Make sure she knows her capitals from lower case. If she's already competent at subtraction, work on her multiplication."

With those few sentences, my parenting philosophy didn't seem so clever any more. Perhaps I shouldn't have laughed off day-care education so much. Maybe I shouldn't have been expecting to dump an alert, intelligent child who can follow instructions off at big school with a note saying "Learn 'er good". Could it be that instead of getting my gardening done on the cheap by having her dig for and count worms I should have been busting out the flash cards? In French?

And so, here I was, leaving each orientation day feeling a little more freaked out. I'm pretty certain the school doesn't actually expect Jas to be able to do multiplication before starting Kindergarten, they've just set - in corporate speak - stretch targets. It took

me a few days to shake the feeling that I'd been doing it all wrong.

But shake it I did. After all, a kid who requests to wear their school uniform every second day and has been practicing tying her shoes laces ever since we bought her school shoes isn't going to collapse. She's keen. I'm keen. She'll show up fed and ready. Any teacher could take her and run with her. The baseline for Jas' first day at school should be a good night's sleep, a good breakfast and an ability to listen to instructions. Anything else is a plus.

It was a relief when the school newsletter arrived requesting that, for the first day, a child should bring a bag with lunch in it. Pencil case: optional. Pencil case optional? Now that sounds like a pretty good first day.

**Chris is a dad who didn't know what the meaning of life was until he had kids. He then realised it was to sleep, but it was too late. With two daughters (aged 5 and 2), and twins on the way, idleness isn't an option for few years to come.**