Preparing your child for Grade 1

A practical guide for Grade R parents and guardians



CURRO LEARNING SUPPORT

Introduction

As Grade 1 approaches, you may wonder whether your child will manage new routines, make friends or feel comfortable asking for help. Everyday opportunities to play, try new things and practise independence can help them approach this next step with confidence.

This guide brings together advice shared at a webinar for parents and guardians on readiness, learning and settling into school, along with practical ideas you can use at home.

Understand school readiness

School readiness is best understood across different settings and over time. Language, developmental differences and previous experiences all matter.

'School readiness' encompasses the skills that help a learner participate in learning. These abilities develop over time with adult support:

1. **Thinking and learning**
   Exploring, asking questions, noticing patterns and solving simple problems.
2. **Emotional readiness**
   Recognising feelings, accepting comfort and recovering from frustration with help.
3. **Social readiness**
   Taking turns, joining activities and using words to work through disagreements.
4. **Everyday independence**
   Following routines, managing belongings, attempting tasks and asking for help.
5. **Physical and self-care skills**
   Moving, using classroom tools and managing everyday personal needs.

An assessment can help identify strengths and areas needing support; discuss its findings with the teacher.

Know what changes in Grade 1

Grade 1 builds on the foundations developed in Grade R. Learners do not need to arrive already reading books or writing sentences independently.

Many Grade 1 activities will feel familiar, but the following may be different:

- The school day generally follows a more structured timetable.
- Your child may have a designated seat.
- Learners spend longer on focused activities and adjust to scheduled breaks.
- Teachers guide them to organise books and stationery and complete tasks more independently.
- Practical learning, movement and music continue.

What can you do?

- **Try saying:** 'You are learning a new routine, and we will help you.'



Things you can do to make your child's Grade 1 experience easier

1. Support learning through everyday life

You don't need to work ahead through the Grade 1 curriculum at home.

What can you do?

- Stories, conversations, games and family routines offer valuable practice, but choose a relaxed moment that fits your day.

2. Build understanding through stories and sounds

Early literacy includes vocabulary, hearing sounds in words, expressing ideas and understanding stories. Knowing the alphabet song is only one part of this foundation. Grade 1 teachers build on it by teaching how letters and sounds form words and discussing what those words mean.

What can you do?

- Read together and ask: 'What do you think will happen next?' or 'Why was the character sad?'
- Invite your child to retell what happened first, next and last.
- Play sound games: 'What sound do you hear at the beginning of ball?'
- Listening to you read is valuable too. Give your child time to talk, describe their experiences and ask about unfamiliar words.

3. Make numbers meaningful

Early numeracy involves understanding quantities, comparing groups and noticing patterns. Counting aloud does not always mean a learner understands how many objects are in a group. In Grade 1, objects, drawings and discussion help clarify these ideas.

What can you do?

- Ask for three spoons when setting the table, then ask how many there are altogether.
- Compare two groups of fruit and ask which has more. Share pieces between family members.
- Look for shapes and patterns while shopping. Ask how a pattern continues.
- Invite your child to explain their thinking. Pattern activities also support the early thinking used in Coding and Robotics.



4. Help instructions feel manageable

Attention helps learners focus; working memory helps them hold information in mind while using it. A forgotten step may mean the instruction was too much to remember.

What can you do?

- Give one or two steps at a time.
- Repeat important information.
- Use pictures if helpful.
- Build up gradually.

5. Protect time for rest and play

Not every moment needs to become a learning activity. If homework regularly becomes a struggle, tell the teacher.

What can you do?

- Puzzles, board games, building and cooking can bring several skills together.
- If your child is tired, allow rest and free play.

6. Prepare for the practical school day

Classroom participation involves the whole body. Movement, hand skills and managing everyday needs all help learners feel comfortable and capable at school.



7. Make room for movement

Core strength and posture support comfortable sitting and using the hands for writing. Balance, coordination and body awareness help children move around the classroom and playground.

What can you do?

- Try climbing, jumping, balancing, crawling, animal walks or ball games.
- A simple obstacle course can make movement playful.

8. Develop hand-and-eye coordination

Hand and finger skills support pencil control, cutting, buttons and zips. Coordinating what the eyes see with hand movements helps with drawing, copying shapes and forming letters. A learner may know what they want to write but find the physical task tiring.

What can you do?

- Offer playdough, blocks, puzzles, drawing, pegs and age-appropriate cutting with child-safe scissors.
- Household activities such as matching socks, stirring ingredients or using tongs also give useful practice.

9. Notice what helps them feel settled

- Noise, busy surroundings, touch and movement can affect learners differently. Some become overwhelmed; others seek movement or find seated activities difficult.

What can you do?

- Notice which situations help your child participate and which make it harder.
- Help them recognise when they feel unsettled and practise asking for help or a break. A quieter space or slow breathing may help.
- Share your observations with the teacher so you can agree on suitable support at school.



Know the most important personal, social and emotional skills for Grade 1 learners

Grade 1 learners are still developing. Reminders, encouragement and help with 'big feelings' remain part of learning. Notice progress over time, taking your child's individual needs into account.

These are some of the most important skills for Grade 1 learners:

Skill	What this may look like
Paying attention	Engaging with an age-appropriate activity. Focus varies with interest, tiredness, difficulty and surroundings.
Managing feelings	Accepting adult help to calm down and return to an activity, even when feelings are strong.
Following instructions	Following familiar, simple instructions and gradually managing more steps, with reminders when needed.
Coping with frustration	Learning to try again with support after becoming upset or wanting to stop.
Independence	Attempting everyday tasks and asking for help, with some reminders or assistance.
Social skills	Learning to share, take turns and negotiate. Disagreements and impulsive responses may still happen.



Supporting your child's emotions and building confidence through realistic expectations

New routines, adults and friendships can bring tiredness, uncertainty, tears or emotional outbursts. Even an excited learner may need time to adjust. Early distress does not automatically mean they will be unable to manage Grade 1. Here's how you can support your child:

1. Practise independence with the belongings they will use at school

Independence includes knowing when and how to ask for assistance. Start with one everyday task. Let them attempt it, offer help when needed and recognise the effort.

What can you do?

- Allow time to try dressing, managing shoes and zips, going to the toilet, washing hands and packing belongings away.
- Use a simple picture checklist for routines, then reduce reminders as confidence grows.
- Practise opening the actual lunchbox, food containers and water bottle.
- Pack manageable portions of familiar food.
- Let your child try opening yoghurt or peeling a banana or naartjie.

2. Make goodbyes predictable

What can you do?

- Read stories about starting school and visit if possible.
- If separation is difficult, practise short separations in safe, familiar settings with trusted adults.
- Agree on a warm arrival routine with the teacher.
- Keep goodbyes brief and consistent, avoiding repeated returns.
- **Try saying:** 'I know saying goodbye can feel difficult. Your teacher is here to help you, and I will collect you after school.'

Ask about classroom routines and whether similar pictures or reminders could help at home. Look together at whether your child gradually settles, builds trust with the teacher and joins activities once they feel safe.

3. Listen before solving

Ordinary disappointments can offer opportunities to practise coping, with support. If a pattern emerges, involve the teacher.



What can you do?

- If your child says, 'Nobody played with me today,' begin with curiosity: 'That sounds lonely. Tell me what happened.'
- Help them consider what they could try tomorrow.

4. Offer support without taking over

Confidence grows as your child experiences what they can achieve with support.



What can you do?

- Allow manageable challenges and small setbacks.
- Acknowledge feelings, then help your child consider another approach.
- Try saying: 'You can try first. If you get stuck, I'll help you.'Or: 'That didn't work yet. What could we try differently?'

5. Notice effort and individual progress

Learners develop at different paces and may find different things easy.



What can you do?

- Recognise persistence, a useful strategy or asking for help: 'You kept trying even when it was difficult.'
- Focus on what is improving and what helps, rather than comparisons with classmates.

6. Reflect on your own worries

This transition affects parents too. Consider whether your child is showing difficulty or whether you are anticipating what might go wrong. Discuss your worries with another adult or the teacher.



What can you do?

- Acknowledge your feelings to your child while showing the situation is manageable.
- Use confident language about school and the adults who will help.
- Rather than repeatedly asking whether your child is scared, remind them that their teacher will help them learn the routines.

Know when to ask for support

Support is a way to understand your child's needs and help them progress. It does not mean they have failed or that you have done something wrong.

How to work with your child's teacher:

- Share relevant information with the teacher when necessary and agree on how you will communicate.
- Speak to them if any distress your child experiences persists or worsens, participation remains difficult, or particular activities are consistently unusually hard.
- Also raise concerns if schoolwork regularly causes significant distress or your child starts saying, 'I'm stupid' or 'I can't do it'.
- Ask: 'What are you noticing at school? What helps? What can we try together?'

Choose one manageable step to begin with. Steady encouragement, room to practise, and a partnership with the school can help your child approach Grade 1 feeling supported and ready to learn.



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