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First steps in a big new world

The first day of school is the beginning of an exciting adventure but it can also be a little scary for many youngsters.

South Western Sydney Local Health District Director of Community Paediatrics Dr Roger Blackmore said children who have been prepared for the first day of school are much more likely to be positive and confident about the big day.

For those children heading off to school for the first time, early preparation can make a big difference to how a child will react to spending a full day at school.

“For most children, Kindergarten is an exciting and wonderful year. However, the confidence, adaptability and stamina of first timers are challenged in the new school environment,” said Dr Blackmore.

“Children will find themselves in an unfamiliar environment with more people, bigger buildings, new routines and demands, different language and cultures and being away from their parents for longer periods of time.

“Parents can help a child to be more comfortable with their new surroundings beforehand. They can visit the school and explore its layout, talk about previous orientation visits and what will happen on the first day,” Dr Blackmore said.

“Discussing questions and concerns is better than letting both parents and children build up a fear of the unknown.

“Some children react to the challenges with immature or dependent behaviour such as tantrums, shyness or wetting pants. This can be confusing and embarrassing for the child, siblings and parents. Support them with reassurance, confidence and patience.

“Persisting problems should receive professional support, starting with the school staff,” Dr Blackmore said.

With support from their parents and teachers most children start school well. However Dr Blackmore said about 10 per cent of children are vulnerable in their development and may not fit in and adjust as well.

“Some children have developmental disabilities, affected speech and language, hearing or vision and these need to be discussed with the school principal before enrolment,” Dr Blackmore said.