National University Hospital

# A guide for parents to prepare their children for school

Brought to you by

Child Development Unit

**Khoo Teck Puat – National University Children's Medical Institute**

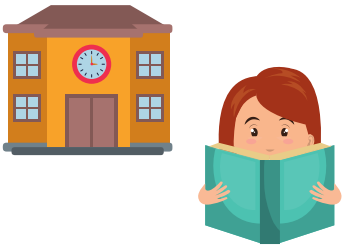
# Back to School Countdown!

As we draw closer to the end of the Circuit Breaker, your child will be returning to school soon. This is a transition which may cause him/her to feel anxious or be resistant to the change. Here are some ways you can prepare your child to go back to school:

## 01

### 1 week before...

Start talking about school and getting excited about it!



## 02

### 3 days before...

Prepare actual things your child needs for school.

## 03

### 1 day before...

Continue your preparation for school with your child.

## 04

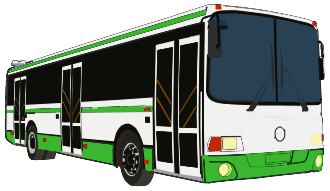
### Helpful Thoughts, Happy Transition

Tips to help parents remain positive when helping their child prepare to return to school.

## 05

### Overcome Worries

Address the fears your child may have about school.



# 1 week before...

## Talk about school

**Find out if your child has any worries about school.** Be open to share your own worries.

Use the **emotion guide** (p. 3 - 4) to help you.

## Read social stories

Read **social stories** to them:

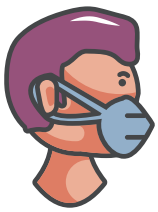
1) "Now I Can Go Outside" (p. 5)
2) "Going Back To School" (p. 6 - 9)

## Adjust sleep cycle

Practise a regular sleep schedule, **similar to one used on a school day**.

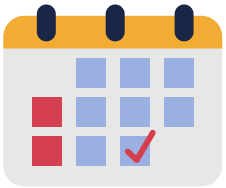
## Talk about safe distancing

Educate your child about **safe distancing** measures.



## Practise wearing a mask

If your child resists wearing a mask, consider **helping your child wear a mask** using this guide.



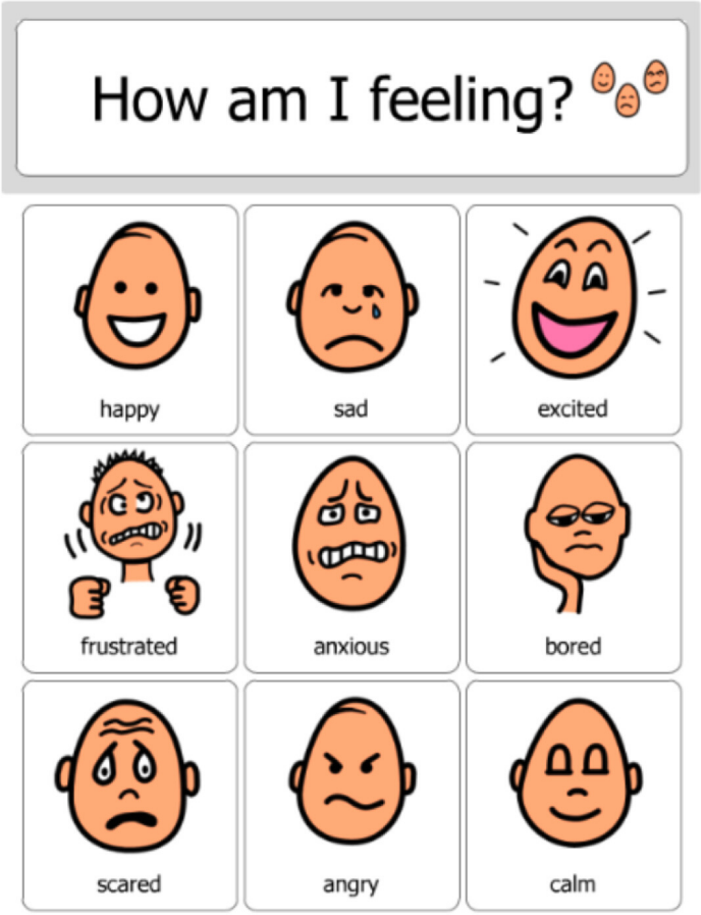
## Establish routine

Establish a routine at home that is **similar to a school day**. *(e.g. have regular meal, snack and nap times.)*

# Emotion Guide

## 1 I feel...

- Start the conversation with your child by using this emotion chart.
- You can take turns pointing at how you feel about going back to school/work.




## 2 Because...

- Suggest reasons why our child might feel the way he/she does. You can also use yourself as an example.

***Happy:*** I can see my friends and teachers again.
***Sad:*** I will not get to see Mummy and Daddy at school.
***Excited:*** I can play with my friends again.
***Frustrated:*** I need to wake up early in the morning.
***Anxious:*** My usual everyday routine is changed again.
***Bored:*** I will not get to watch TV at home.
***Scared:*** I may meet new friends and teachers.
***Angry:*** I find it difficult to make or play with friends.
***Calm:*** I like going to school.

# Emotion Guide

## 3 I can...

- Show your child what he/she can do when he/she feels a certain way.
- Be creative - come up with fun and useful strategies with your child by trying new ways.

***Happy:*** If I get too happy, I can **squeeze and open my hands**.
***Sad:*** I can **hug Mummy and Daddy**.
***Excited:*** I can **do wall push-ups**.
***Frustrated:*** I can **take deep breaths**.
***Anxious:*** I can **read social stories, talk to an adult or count**.
***Bored:*** I can **chat with friends**.
***Scared:*** I can **self talk**.
***Angry:*** I can **use fidgets or push or pull heavy things**.
***Calm:*** I am ok and **ready for school**.

# Social Story:
# Now I Can Go Outside

Now I can go outside.

I go to school again.

When I go out of the house,

I need to...

1 Wash my hands with soap

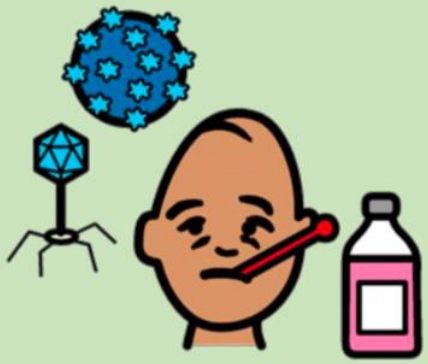
and water.

2 Wear a mask to cover my nose

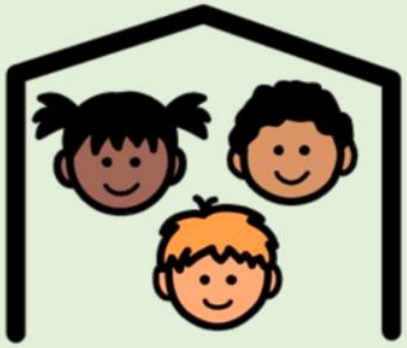
and mouth.

This helps me stay strong and healthy.

# Social Story:
# Going Back To School

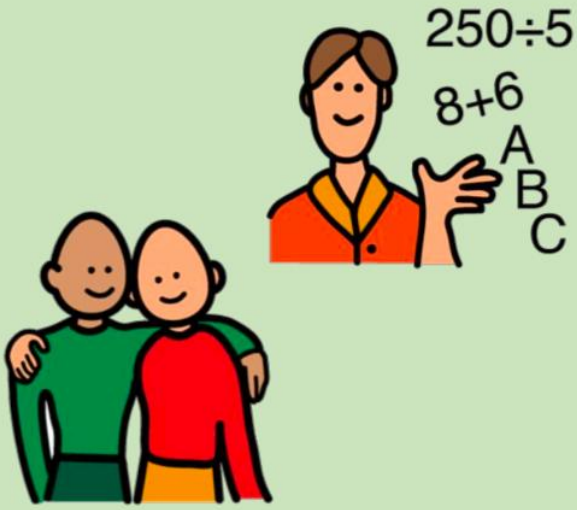


The Circuit Breaker is ending.



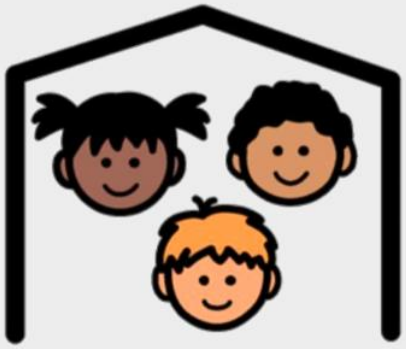
This means I will go back to school.

When I go back to school, I have to do things to get ready for school.



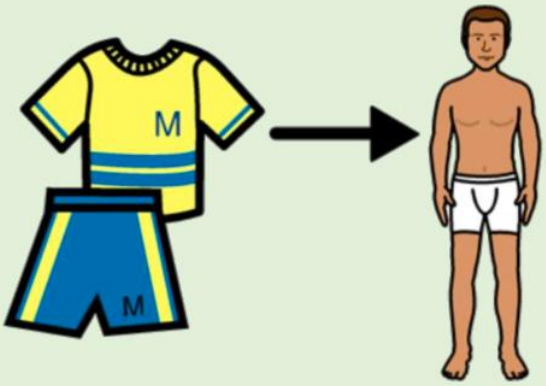

I will also meet my friends and teachers.

# Social Story:
# Going Back To School

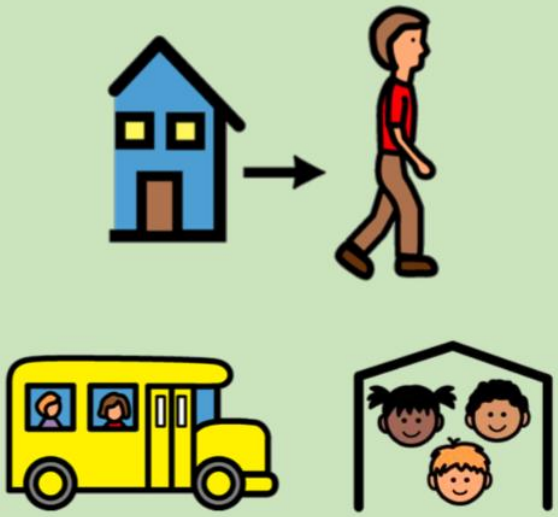


When I go back to school, I need to...

1) Pack my bag for school.

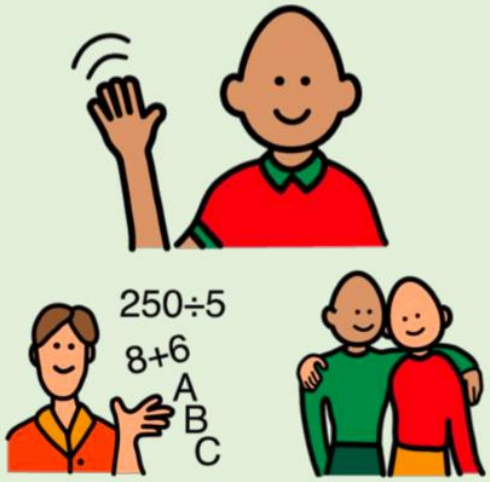



2) Wear my school uniform.



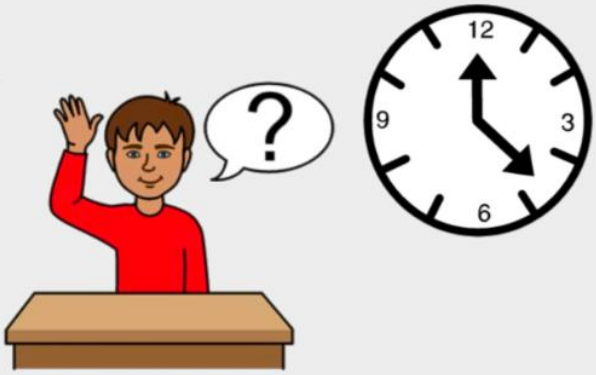
3) Go outside my home and travel to school.

# Social Story:
# Going Back To School

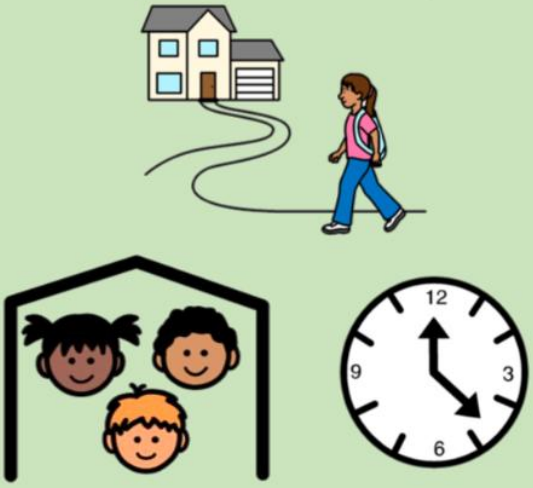



4) Say hello to my teachers and friends.

If I want to go home when I am at school,



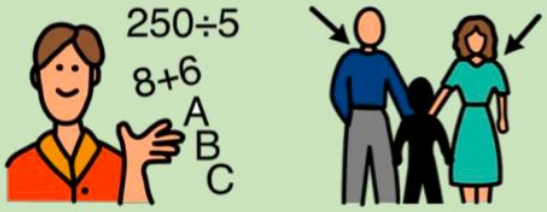

I can ask my teacher what time does school end.




I can go home when school ends.

# Social Story:
# Going Back To School

This will help me to be okay.



My teacher, Mummy and Daddy will also be happy when I go home at the time when school ends.

# 3 days before...

## Wash school uniform

**Involve your child** in preparing his/her uniform for school. *(e.g. putting it in the washing machine, hanging it up to dry, putting it on a hanger)*

## Pack school bag

Pack your child's school bag together with him/her. You can use the **Pack My Bag** (p. 11) visual guide.

## Look at photos

Show your child photos of the school building, his/her teachers and friends to **remind him/her about school**.

## Plan snack time

**Let your child choose** and even shop or order the snacks he/she would like to bring to school.

## New things

**Prepare your child for new changes.** Get him/her excited about having something new to take to school, if applicable. *(e.g. new shoes, waterbottle)*

## Preparing simple gifts

**Get your child excited** about school by helping him/her prepare something to give his/her teachers and friends. *(e.g. handmade cards, individually wrapped snacks.)*

# Pack My Bag

1 School bag

2 Pencil case

3 Homework

4 Books

5 Water bottle

6 Snack

7 Face mask

# 1 day before...

## Practise hand washing

**Use this guide** to practise proper hand washing!

## Practise wearing a mask

Continue to remind your child to wear a mask and practise wearing it with him/her.

**Use this guide** to help you.

## Get ready!

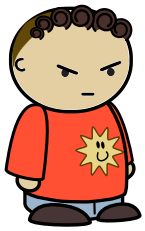
**Together with your child,** check that he/she has everything ready for school!

*(e.g. uniform, school bag, snacks, gifts)*

# Helpful Thoughts, Happy Transition

At times, your child may have difficulties expressing him/herself. This can sometimes result in challenging behaviours.

In this section, we will focus on what these behaviours are and help you identify what your child may be saying. By shifting your mindset, you can manage these behaviours more effectively as well as retain some positivity in you.



## Refusing to go back to school

Unhelpful thought

"Oh no, I've to go through the whole process of transiting him/her to school again!"

Reason for behaviour

**Your child may be avoiding school due to previous experiences that he/she sees as negative.**

Helpful thought

**"I can talk to my child about what makes him/her excited and remind him/her that he/she enjoyed going to school."**

**"It will be better this time as the school is not completely new to him/her. He/she had spent a full year in this school last year, and loved it."**

**"I have prepared him/her for school before and I will be able to use what worked then to help him/her again."**

## Clingy to parents

Unhelpful thought

"I HAVE TO FINISH THIS PIECE OF WORK AND HE/SHE KEEPS ASKING FOR ME TO PLAY WITH HIM/HER. I CAN'T DO THIS ANYMORE!"

Reason for behaviour

**Your child may be trying to get your attention as he/she wants to spend more time with you.**

Helpful thought

"Wanting to spend more time with me is a normal reaction to having to go back to school."

"I can find some things to occupy him/her while he/she waits for me to finish my work. We can play together after that."

## Refusing to follow usual routines

(e.g. sleeping late)

Unhelpful thought

"WHY IS HE/SHE NOT COOPERATING?"

Reason for behaviour

**The lack of structure in the day may have disrupted your child's daily routines.**

**It may also be his/her physiological reaction to anxiety or stress.**

Helpful thought

"I will need to progressively get my child back to his/her usual sleep cycle (or any other routines) and not expect an overnight change."

"This is a phase that he/she will eventually get over. Meanwhile, I can try to read up on what I can do to help him/her return to the usual routine."

## Poor appetite or loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities

Unhelpful thought

"Have I done something wrong?"

"Should I have / Should I not have..."

Reason for behaviour

It may be your child's physiological reaction to anxiety or stress.

Helpful thought

""It is normal for my child to experience some stress and anxiety about going back to school or meeting his/her friends after a long time."

"I can follow the timeline recommended in this book to prepare him/her to go back to school."

## Crying or fussing when school is mentioned

Unhelpful thought

"This is so hard! I feel like crying too!"

Reason for behaviour

Your child may be trying to get your attention as he/she is anxious about not having you with him/her all the time.

Helpful thought

"It is hard for me as well. I am not looking forward to going back to the office either. Maybe I can tell my child that feeling this way is normal and we cannot stay away from school/office forever as there are things to learn and things for us to do. We can still spend time as a family in the evenings, weekends and during holidays."

# Overcome Worries

It is common for children, especially those with special educational needs, to feel anxious and worried about going to school. These fears are usually because of something the child has difficulties with.

Here are some common fears children have, and what you may consider doing to help.

## Worries about separation from family and home

### Acknowledge your child's feelings

*(e.g. Say "I know you are sad about...")*

After being home for an extended period of time, going back to school might feel like the very first day of school again.

### Focus on the positive

- Try to remind your child about the **things that he/she liked** about school.
  *(e.g. specific activities, teachers, friends, taking the bus to school)*

- Give your child **something to look forward to** after school.
  *(e.g. a favourite meal together, playtime together with you, a walk in the park)*

# Worries about school work

## Acknowledge and praise

Acknowledge that school may be difficult at times. Recognise and **praise** your child for his/her efforts.

## Support help-seeking behaviours

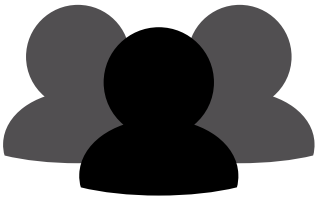
- Encourage your child to **ask the teacher for help** in class.
- Teach your child how to ask for help.
  *(e.g. raise your hand and say "I need help, please")*
- Practise such helping-seeking behaviours at home through role-play.

## Tune in

Find out what your child likes about school and **what he/she finds difficult** so that you may help to address any problems early before it worsens.

## Build self-esteem – Identify strengths

Remind your child that while being a good student is important, **he/she has other strengths as well**.
*(e.g. being friendly or helpful in class, being good at drawing, singing or sports)*



# Worries about social situations

## Provide social scripts

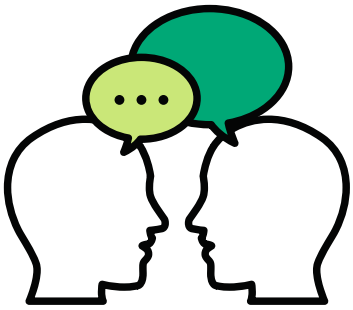
Teach your child what to say:

- **Greetings**: *"Hi! My name is..." ,"What is your name?"*
- **Conversation starters**: *"What did you do at home?", "I like your toy!", "I have this toy. Do you want to play together?"*

## Role play

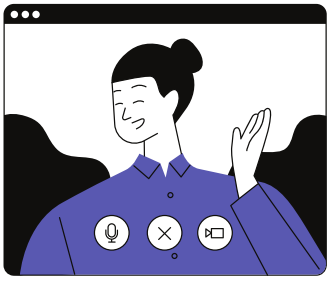
Teach your child what to do and **practise these steps** with your child at home:

1. Approach your classmate with a smile.
2. Get your classmate's attention by waving or saying "Hi".
3. Keep an appropriate distance.
4. Ask him/her a question.
5. Look and listen while he/she is talking.
6. Take turns talking.
7. Be polite and use nice words.



Use the **"Greeting Classmates"** comic (p. 20) to help you.

## Arrange virtual playdates



Help your child **stay connected** and provide opportunities for him/her to **practise social skills** by arranging virtual playdates with family and friends!

# Other General Strategies

## Be firm about going to school

- **Establish a goodbye routine**. Make it a special handshake that you and your child can do together each time you have to say goodbye.

- **Leave immediately** after entrusting your child to his/her teacher. Do not delay. Your child is more likely to settle in faster if you do not hang around.

## Teach positive self-talk

Positive self-talk involves talking to ourselves in an encouraging and kind way.

**Model positive thoughts** by saying them out loud. *(e.g. Say "Today is going to be a great day!", "I am getting better every day.")*

Make a short list of positive statements that **you and your child can say together** at the start of each day, or use this one:

**I am calm and relaxed.**
**I am smart and ready to learn.**
**If I fall, I will get up again.**
**I can do anything!**

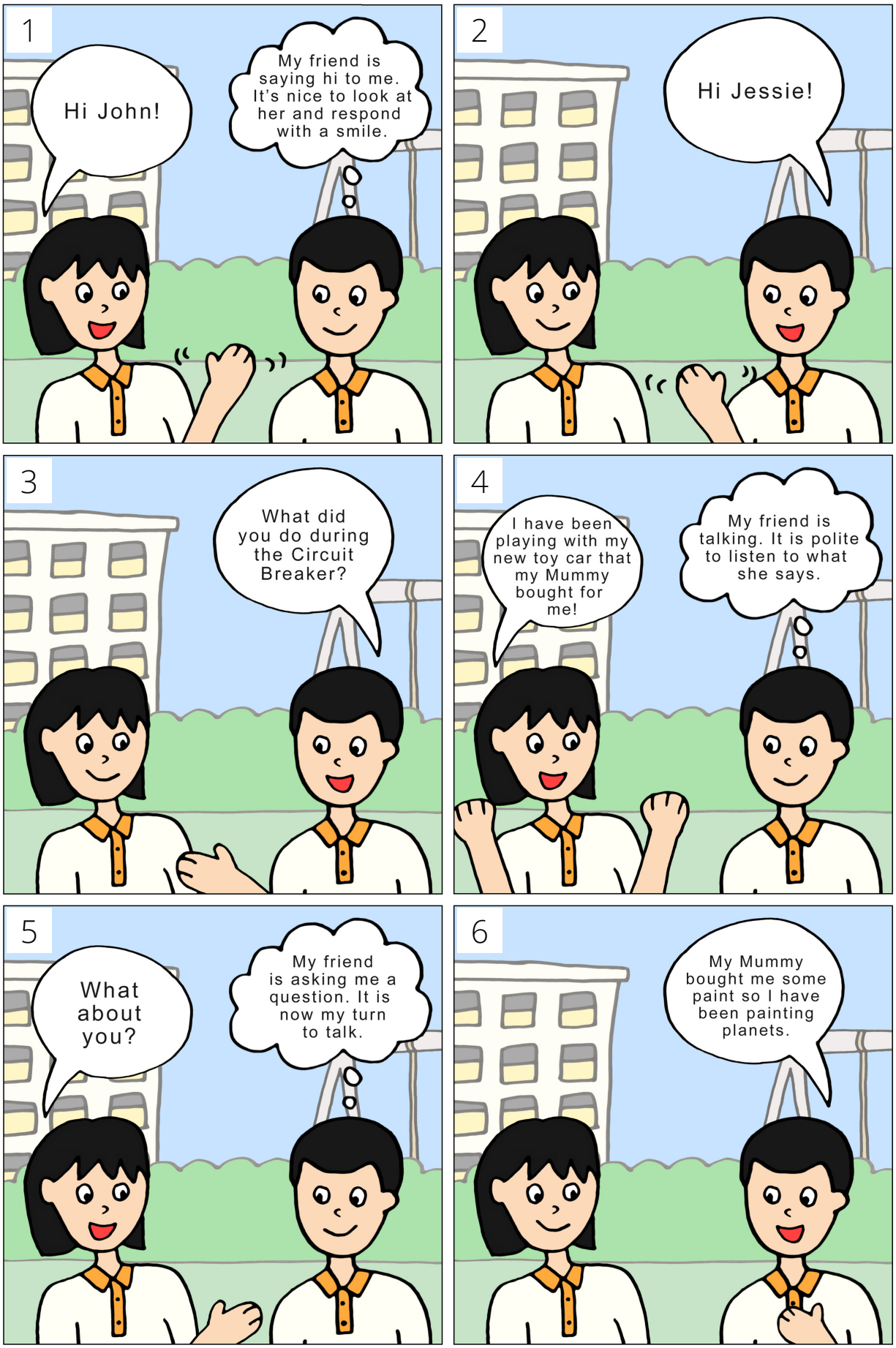
## Use a reward system

Encourage specific behaviours by providing simple rewards and generous praise.

- Create a **rewards menu** with higher 'costs' for more motivating rewards.
- Your child **gets a star** when he/she behaves the way you want.
- Your child can **exchange the stars** for something on the rewards menu.
- **Reduce the use** of this reward system when your child gets more comfortable with school.

Consider using our **sample rewards menu and star charts** (p. 21 - 24) to help you.

# Comic:
# Greeting Classmates



# Sample Rewards Menu

Family time

**15 stars**

New book

**10 stars**

20 mins play

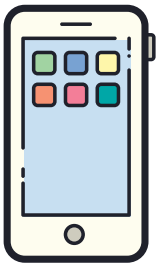
**15 stars**

20 mins music

**20 stars**

Favourite food

**20 stars**



10 mins game

**25 stars**

_____'s

# REWARDS MENU

_____

_____ stars

_____

_____ stars

_____

_____ stars

_____

_____ stars

_____

_____ stars

# Sample Star Chart

GOAL: 15 STARS

REWARD: 20 MINS PLAY

| TASK/ ACTIVITY | MON | TUES | WED | THURS | FRI |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PACKED MY BAG | ★ | | ★ | | |
| WORE MY UNIFORM | ★ | | ★ | ★ | ★ |
| WENT TO SCHOOL | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ |
| STAYED IN SCHOOL | | | ★ | ★ | ★ |
| RETURNED HOME FROM SCHOOL | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ |

HOW MANY STARS I EARNED: 19

# _____'S STAR CHART

GOAL: _____ STARS

REWARD:

| TASK/ ACTIVITY | MON | TUES | WED | THURS | FRI |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

HOW MANY STARS I EARNED: _____

**NUH Child Development Unit**
Operating Hours: 8.30am - 5.30pm (Mon to Fri)
Jurong Medical Centre Appointment Line: +65 6665 2530/2531
Kent Hong Community Club Appointment Line: +65 6769 4537/4637
Fax: +65 6665 0158
Email: cdu@nuhs.edu.sg
Website: www.nuh.com.sg/nuhkids

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