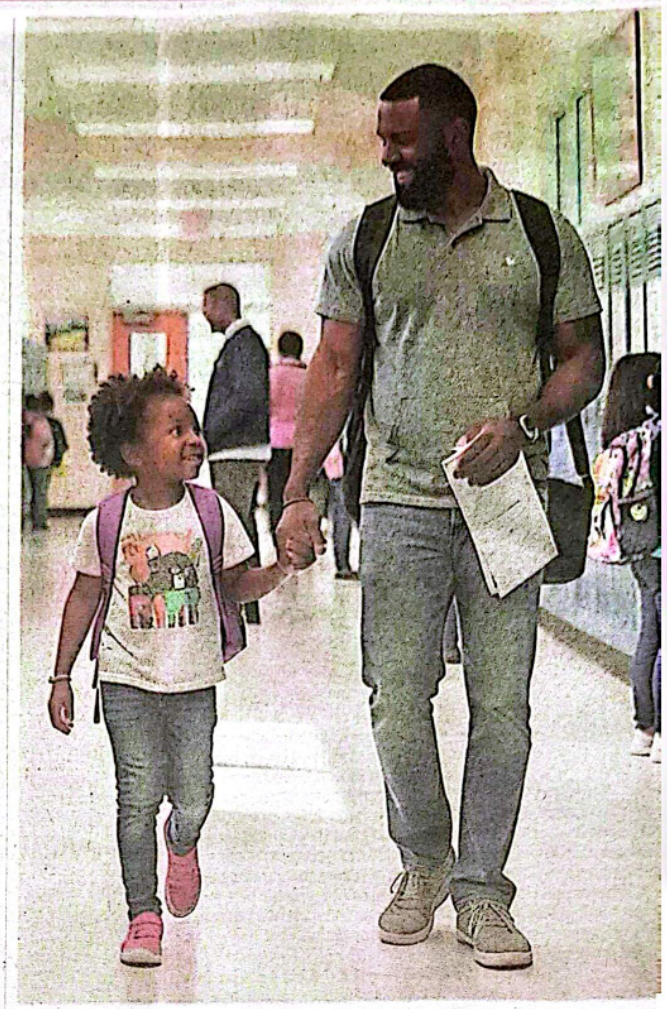
Preparing children and parents for first day of school



When a child goes to school for the first time, it is an emotional test for parents too.

BY MICHAEL AGABA

Amina had always believed she was strong. Life had demanded it of her. She woke before the sun each day in the small town of Kakiri, swept the compound, boiled water over a charcoal stove, and walked to the market where she sold tomatoes and dried fish.

Strength, to her, meant surviving. But when her son Saddam was accepted into primary school, Amina discovered a new kind of fear—one she had not prepared for.

The school letter lay folded inside her wrapper for days. Every time she touched it, her heart tightened. "Your child is expected to report on Monday," it said. Monday felt too close, too sudden, too heavy.

Saddam was only six. He still slept curled beside her on cold nights. He still asked endless questions about ants, clouds, and why the moon followed them home. How could she send him into a world she did not fully understand herself?

Amina had never gone to school. As a child, she had stayed home to help her mother care for her younger siblings. She could count money well and recognise market signs, but books were strangers to her. The thought of helping Saddam with homework made her stomach twist with shame.

"What if I fail him?" she whispered one night, staring at the cracked ceiling.

Money was another worry. The school required a uniform, shoes, books, and fees. Each item sounded small when spoken, but together they felt like a mountain. Amina began saving coins in an old tin under her bed, skipping small comforts and walking longer distances to save transport money. Some evenings, she ate less so Saddam could eat more, telling herself she was not hungry.

Saddam noticed. "Mother," he asked one evening, "will school be like the stories you tell me?" Amina smiled, though her eyes burnt. "Yes, my son. You will learn many things." "But will you come with me?" he asked.

"I will be with you here," she said, touching his chest. "Always."

As the first day approached, Amina tried to prepare him the only way she knew how. She taught him to greet elders properly, to sit still when spoken to, to share with other children. She practiced waking him early and showed him how to wash his face by himself. When he struggled to button his shirt, she resisted the urge to do it for him, even though it took patience she did not know she possessed.

The night before school began, rain fell hard on the tin roof. Saddam slept soundly, clutching his small backpack. Amina stayed awake, her thoughts loud. She prayed, not for wealth or ease but for courage, for herself and her child.

Morning came quickly.

She dressed Saddam carefully in his oversized uniform, smoothing the creases with her hands. He looked different—older somehow. When they reached the school gate, the noise overwhelmed her. Children cried, laughed, and clung to parents. Teachers blew whistles and shouted instructions.

Saddam's hand tightened around hers.

"I am scared," he said. So was she.

Amina knelt and looked him in the eyes. "Being brave does not mean you are not afraid," she said slowly. "It means you try even when you are scared."

When she handed him over to the teacher, Saddam cried. Amina felt the tears rise too, but she turned away before he could see them. She walked home with a hollow ache in her chest, wondering if she had done the right thing. That afternoon, Saddam ran toward her from the school gate, dust on his shoes and excitement in his eyes.

"Mother!" he shouted. "I learned a song! And I wrote my name!"

Amina laughed and cried at the same time. In that moment, she understood something important: she did not need to know everything to be a good parent. She only needed to be present, to try, and to love fiercely.

The struggle did not disappear. There were still fees to pay, uniforms to mend, and lessons she could not explain. But each day, Amina learnt alongside her son. And when the school bell rang each morning, it rang not only for Saddam, but for her hopes, her sacrifices, and the future she was bravely building.

The Ministry of Education and Sports announced that schools would begin on February 10. This is two weeks away from today. And some parents such as Amina are afraid for themselves and their children. But they don't have to be.

Preparing a child for school is an important milestone in a child's life and a parent's journey. For first-time parents, this stage can feel exciting, emotional, and overwhelming all at once. Questions about readiness, routines, emotions, and learning often arise. However, with patience, preparation, and understanding, parents can help their children transition smoothly into school life. Let us break it down:

Emotional preparation

Emotional readiness is one of the most important aspects of preparing a