

Easing the Preschool Transition

Let's face it, as fun and exciting as preschool sounds, the transition can be a very emotional time for both you and your child. You're probably excited about the adventures your child will have and hopeful for all of the new friends s/he will meet. While at the same time, apprehensive that your youngster will be without you. These feelings are normal and expected. Your child will also be experiencing a wide range of emotions about this upcoming change. They might be proud to be a big kid but still worry about separating from you and beginning something unfamiliar. While each child's needs are unique and different, there are some things that you can do to help make the transition easier for everyone.

PROCESS YOUR FEELINGS & LISTEN TO YOUR CHILD'S WORRIES

While it's OK for you to feel apprehension about your child's first day, it's best if you keep school related comments positive. When your child expresses some worry, it's important to let them know that you hear them, no matter what the worry is. Let your child know that it's normal to feel happy, sad, scared, excited or worried. New experiences can be all of those things! Lots of children feel this way.

TELL YOUR CHILD WHAT TO EXPECT

New faces and new routines can be upsetting. Young children thrive on routine and consistency as it helps them know what to expect. When explaining, try to stick to the specifics of the day. Discuss the details of what might happen during their school morning (i.e. you will paint, listen to a story, go outside to the playground, ride bikes in the big room, etc.) Attending playground Meet-ups before the first day also helps to make the teacher a more familiar face.

CREATE A ROUTINE

Two weeks before school starts is the perfect time to adjust bedtime to match the new school schedule. It might also be helpful to mirror some of the school's routine – play time in the morning with lunch around 12noon. Nap or errands can follow in the afternoon. Being away from you in a new environment is a lot of change as it is. Adjusting your schedule ahead of time will help the rhythms of the school day feel more natural to your child.

READ A STORY

Children love stories! Reading classic books that tackle separation anxiety, like Anna Dewdney's *Llama Llama Misses Mama* or Audrey Penn's *The Kissing Hand* or Martin Waddell's *Owl Babies*, will not only give you and your child a way to talk about how it feels to be apart, but it can spark new ways to deal with it. Once your child knows the story, try telling him/her each morning, "I always come back, just like Mama Llama does."

SAYING GOODBYE

When it comes to saying goodbye, a quick, upbeat one is best. This lets them know that you are excited for them to have fun at school. While it might be tempting, don't sneak away if your child becomes

distracted by another activity. Always let him/her know that you are leaving. Your child needs to learn that school is a place s/he goes to without his/her parents and saying goodbye is part of the process.

If your child does well on the first day, be prepared, you aren't out of the woods just yet. Some children waltz right into preschool as happy as can be and everyone is content. But then, out of nowhere, a few weeks into the school year, your child may get upset or start to cry when you leave. This is also very common. The novelty of school has worn off and your child realizes that you are not with them. This, too, shall pass.

Remember, your child's teacher is well prepared and skilled in helping your son/daughter have a smooth and positive entrance. They have many ideas up their sleeves, from bringing in favored lovies to creating helper jobs, to support your child (and you) through this process.