

Easing the Transition to School

The first days of school can trigger a wide range of emotions for caregivers and children; some will find it very challenging in the beginning. There are ways to help ease this transition for both you and your child. Consider these ideas:

☞ Take advantage of [Welcome Day](#)

You can spend time in the classroom with your child, getting to know the teachers and giving your child the opportunity to explore without having to say goodbye to you. Walk around the room with your child, find something that's particularly interesting and spend some time together investigating it. Bring up this something at home as you talk about returning to the classroom in the future.

Let the teachers know if you anticipate there will be difficulty with drop offs. Keep your words positive in front of your child, and let the teacher know any special activities that tend to soothe or particularly engage your child.

☞ **The Ritual**

Make a conscious drop off ritual that makes sense for your family. Be realistic about how much time you can spend in the classroom and how long your ritual will take. A longer drop off ritual does not typically ease the final goodbye, but a consistent ritual does.

Feel free to spend a portion of the morning visiting the class with your child during the first two weeks. As your child explores the room, follow your child to the activities that interest them. Most children do well with keeping a favorite "lovey" at school with them, whether they nap at school or not. Let your child know at what time you'll be leaving, using the classroom clock and/or daily schedule as references for your child, and start your goodbye ritual at that time as promised.

Do not sneak out when your child is distracted. This leads to children feeling unsettled with the whole separation process, and it is much more difficult to reassure your child when their caregiver disappeared without a "goodbye."

A drop off ritual might include sitting together and making a particular drawing (a hand outline for each of you to keep or a stick figure picture of the family), reading a short story, or together unpacking your child's backpack. Decide on a special connection you and your child will make as you say your goodbyes. It may be three kisses, a special handshake, etc. Then give your goodbyes and leave the classroom.

Once you offer your final goodbye, it is important that you follow through and calmly leave the classroom. When the caregiver returns to the child to soothe or restarts the routine the child, quite understandably, learns that this push-pull is how separating from their caregiver is always supposed to go. It is quite a stressful feeling for both the child and the adult.

The classroom staff will be ready to actively help support your child as you leave and after.

☞ Many children do not become upset as they separate from caregivers. Do not try to elicit a more emotional response by asking the child if they'll miss you or by telling them that you'll be sad to be away from them. Trust that your child is feeling confident and independent in this phase and that their love for you is strong. Stick to your goodbye ritual even when your child is at ease.

↪ If your child is returning to the program after summer break, remind them that there may be new children as well as old friends in the classroom. You may want to modify a previous goodbye ritual as they age, but many children like to maintain at least pieces of the established ritual.

↪ **Acknowledge your child's feelings about the transition**

If your child is having strong emotions, you can acknowledge this by using simple statements to label their feelings both as you leave and at home as you talk about the day. You might say, "You're feeling sad when I leave," or "You feel angry that I'm not staying with you at school." Use a calm, soothing voice and touch your child gently to communicate that you understand and that you are taking them seriously. Give your child time to respond.

It is important to acknowledge your child's feelings, even if their actions are upsetting to you. Calm acknowledgement lets your child know that it is okay to have strong feelings. Allowing them to fully express strong feelings, with words or tears but not with violence, typically helps children move on and begin adjust to the new situation.

↪ **Communicate with the teachers**

The teachers will be happy to help you and your child with suggestions and support. They've been through these transitions many times and have a wealth of experience. Please remember to share with the teachers any spontaneous or planned changes to your child's outside-of-school routine, such as a parent away, a home guest, changes in living arrangements, the death of a pet.

Teachers are available in the classroom for at least 15 minutes after dismissal time. This is an excellent time to ask how the day went for your child and give any updates to the teacher in person.

Parents are always welcome to contact the lower school counselor, Diana Platas, for assistance and support with transitions or other concerns that may arise.

Diana Platas
503-292-7776 x328
dplatas@faispdx.org