

HOW TO PREPARE YOUR CHILD FOR SCHOOL

For starters, remember that both you and your child will need time to get used to the new setup. Try to be patient; even if you make every effort to prepare your child, it will probably be a few days before she comes skipping over to you at pick-up time, more eager to show you her art project than to go home.

Here are some tips on what you can do beforehand:

- Learn as much as possible about the daycare center or school before your child's first day, so you can answer her questions about it. And make a point of telling her -- without exaggeration or false enthusiasm -- about one or two of the fun activities she'll get to take part in, either in the classroom or on the playground.
- Talk about the change calmly, expressing confidence that it'll go well. Your child will pick up on your expectations -- and probably fulfill them.
- Visit the daycare center or classroom with your child before her first day. Introduce her to the director or teacher and let her check out the place and people at her own pace. Hold off on urging her to talk or play until she's had time to get comfortable.
- Find a story about a child going to daycare or school for the first time, and read it together. Some good books are *See You Later, Alligator*, by Laura McGee Kvasnosky; *Will You Come Back for Me?* by Ann Tompert; *Adam's Daycare*, by Julie Ovenell-Carter (most useful if your child, like Adam, will be going to a daycare based in someone's home); and, for toddlers already fond of Carl the gentle rottweiler, *Carl Goes to Daycare*, by Alexandra Day. If your child is starting preschool, she'll love *Amanda Pig, Schoolgirl*, by Jean Van Leeuwen; *Will I Have a Friend?* by Miriam Cohen; or *Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten*, by Joseph Slate.

Don't be overly enthusiastic about school but calmly explain what your child can expect to do at school. Discuss the playground and the toys that your child will be able to play with.

Once you have verbally prepared your child, the next step may be to "physically" prepare them. During a special shopping trip let your child pick out a special cot sheet, blanket, and or pillow for nap time at school. How about a new backpack or book bag to bring home all the beautiful arts & crafts that they will be making? Let them go to the grocery store and pick out things for their lunch. This can be a great routine throughout the school year. Stickers on the lunch bag are very popular. The important thing is to let your child feel like they are a part of all the preparations.

If your child has not been used to getting up early, you may consider getting them into an earlier bedtime routine a week or two before starting preschool, and allowing them to awaken at an earlier time in the morning. A child that is overly tired will tend to be clingy or more irritable when you drop them off at the caregiver.

On that big first day, remember to keep that positive and excited attitude as you prepare your child for the day ahead. Remember; any reservations or apprehensions that you may have, will be picked up by your little one. When you arrive, don't carry your child into the center. Have your child walk to the door and walk in on their own. This will take some training and is best done with children over 18 months old. If your child cries and whines to be held, tell them, "You are a big boy (girl) now and you can walk." Take your child gently but firmly by the hand and lead him to the door.

Once inside, tell your child in a relaxed and cheerful voice, how proud you are of them, and remind them of how much fun they are going to have, how much you love them and assure them that you will return for them right after work. Say to them, in a happy voice, "Mom (Dad) is going to work now. I will be back later when I'm done. You have lots of fun things to do today too!" By telling your child you'll be back, this assures them you are not abandoning them. This is your cue to leave. If your child begins to get upset, the longer you stay, the more upset the child will become. Make your drop off time quick and pleasant. Don't prolong your stay, as this shows the child you are reluctant to leave them

there. If you are uncomfortable about leaving your child, they will be able to read that in your actions.

Please try to hold back your tears until you are out the door. Seeing a parent cry will only make the child afraid. Anyone who has had to leave their precious little one with a caregiver or teacher knows the feeling you get when you hear your child call for you and you have to walk away. This is a big step in your life as well as theirs. The more you stick your head back into the room, the more your child will try to convince you to stay or to take them with you. **Never sneak out when your child isn't looking!** This will only increase a child's fear of separation and abandonment. Give them a quick hug and a kiss and say goodbye. Do not pick up your child! The transition will be harder if you have to pull your child off your body.

A good caregiver will encourage you to listen at the door or call when you arrive at your destination to see how your little one is doing. Remember that a caregiver has other children to care for, so discuss with them the right time to call, or if possible, to leave a message for them to call back when they have time. It may be very hard to believe, but children generally do calm down almost immediately after the parent leaves the building. This is when the child is comforted by the caregiver and is introduced to his or her new friends. Most children are done crying by the time you are even out of the driveway. Your childcare provider will certainly let you know if your child cried all day. (don't worry we don't let them cry all day) Trust your provider. They have been through this dozens of times and know what to do with your child. Some children never cry at drop off. Others will cry.

You may consider giving your child "a little piece of home" to keep with them during the day. This could be a favorite blanket or toy, a picture of Mom or Dad, or special stuffed animal that the child can keep in their "cubbie". They can go and get it out when they are feeling lonely. Another thing to do is give your child a special job, for example, allow them to hold your sunglasses for the day, saying that you will be back to get them for the drive home (nothing valuable or irreplaceable).

In order to continue a smooth transition from the first day onward, you and your child should establish a daily routine. Discuss with your child things such as; "Tomorrow you can play with all of your new friends again". Set a specific time for bed and awaken them the same way each morning. Try not to be rushed in the morning. If possible, have one parent drop the child off each morning and have the other parent do the afternoon pick-ups. For instance, Mom takes the mornings, and Dad does the afternoon pick-ups. This type of routine helps reassure the child that they will not be forgotten by you at daycare.

In summary: Separation anxiety is normal in young children. But it can be difficult to head off to work when your child's cries are echoing in your head. However, if you follow these steps to making drop off times more relaxed and happier, you and your child will both learn to work through separation anxiety together. With consistency and a well practiced routine, your child will make a quick adjustment to daycare or preschool; and just think of all the friends they will make, and experiences they will have to fill their day!

Compiled from various articles and experiences.