



Starting the Pre-School Year Off on the Right Foot

Whether your child is starting pre-school for the first time, changing schools or just starting a new year at their familiar “home away from home,” there is often a great deal of anxiety and angst at the start of the school year. Most people resist change in their lives and do better with routines. For toddlers, this is especially true. As a result, many 2 to 5 year olds experience some degree of separation anxiety with “drop offs” at school and will express negative feelings about going to preschool for the first few weeks. Although this is both common and normal, there are a few approaches that parents can take to help minimize the stresses during this transition time for the child, themselves and the teacher at school.

Talk about the upcoming new routines: Express to your child both how excited you are about the start of preschool and about how proud you are of them for undertaking such an important step. Children need to hear these kinds of messages repeatedly for them to sink in. Begin talking about their preschool several weeks before the year starts and bring it up daily. Ask them how they feel about starting school and listen to their answer. If they express fear or anxiety, validate those feelings as being normal. Let them know that all kids (and parents too) experience those feelings with new things.

Make the setting familiar to the child: Point out the location of the school every time you drive by. Wave to it and express excitement as you do. If you have time, stop by and walk around so that the child is comfortable with the “lay of the land” before school starts.

Keep any worry to yourself: It is normal as parents to worry about how your child will transition into the new environment. If you express doubt or concern, your son or daughter will pick up on that and it may worsen their apprehension. Keep such adult conversations on these topics well out of ear shot of your child. They are smarter than you think.

Don't be in a rush: When school begins, give yourself and your child enough time to park, arrive and go in to school in a relaxed manner. As with all new routines, things can run behind schedule so plan for that and leave extra time in the mornings. If the day starts in a stressful, hurried fashion then you are setting your child up for a stressful drop off. Taking the extra 5

minutes to not pressure your child to hurry through breakfast or run to the car will make all the difference for the whole day.

Don't take too long at drop off: Stay for few minutes to get your child situated, but don't linger. If you stay too long after you get to school, your child may sense that you are having separation issues as well. Offer a few ideas for activities to participate in, tell them that you know they'll have a great day, give them a hug and a kiss and go. Preschool teachers are very good at gauging how long parents should stay. Follow their suggestions and lead. If things are a bit rocky at first, ask the teacher for input as to how to ease the morning transition for your child.

Reconnect at the end of the day: When you pick your child up, ask them about what they did today at school. Often times you'll get 1-2 word answers at first. An hour later you may hear stories or many more details. When this happens, take a few minutes to let them expand on their story and ask them follow up questions. Being interested in their activities will add to the positive attitude about their new school experience.

--Be well

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