

## Preparing for Preschool

### 12 tips to help you help your preschooler prepare to separate:

1. **Provide specific information:** Try not to minimize this major transition with statements like, “you’ll love it! It will be so much fun!” or “there’s nothing to be scared of”. The truth is that heading into a new situation with limited information is scary, even for most adults. Calm your child’s fears with specific information about the location of the school, what kinds of toys will be there, the daily schedule (play, read, snack, outside, read, dismiss) who they might know, the names of the teachers, and what they will bring to school each day. \*Visit the school at least once, preferably when other kids are there. Driving by and pointing out the school regularly helps your child make sense of where it is in relation to your house, how long it will take you to get there, and what it looks like.

2. **Create a goodbye ritual:** A common fear among new preschoolers is that you will forget to come back or will get lost on the way. Preschoolers struggle to understand time, so statements such as, “I will see you in three hours” are meaningless. That feels like forever! Most preschools have a daily schedule posted near the door or end the day with a story. Say something such as, “I will be waiting for you after you read your last story for the day.” Create a goodbye routine together to keep it simple and avoid long goodbyes. “Hug, kiss, high five, I love you” works wonders for my anxious daughter. Keeping goodbyes short helps your child know that you feel safe leaving her there. \*Keep your own emotions in check! It’s very difficult to leave your child behind, but they pick up on parental emotions and ambivalence quickly and will act accordingly. Save your tears for the parking lot.

3. **Add structure:** Preschoolers love structure. It helps them know what to expect throughout the day. About one month before preschool starts, try to start structuring your day in a similar way to the preschool. Having a beginning and an end for breakfast time, playtime, snack, reading, outside time, and lunch helps prepare your child to make transitions. Transitioning is often a difficult task for new preschoolers. Anxious children have been known to cry during transitions. Practicing at home gets them used to moving between activities. Fine-tune your bedtime and morning routines during this month before school starts as well. Lay out clothes and pack backpacks the night before, know what you’re making for breakfast in advance, and practice getting out the door on time. Mornings move very quickly when you have to be somewhere by 9am. Practice makes perfect!

**4. Structured activities:** Many preschools focus on different activities in structured time periods: Art projects, indoor play, outdoor play, etc. Adding structured activities at home prior to the start of school helps prepare your child. Read for 15 minutes, work on art for 15 minutes, head outside for 20 minutes, etc. Again, getting used to a beginning and an end helps children understand and adjust to making transitions.

**5. Listening skills:** No need to worry if your child doesn't really have listening skills yet, this is the initial goal of many preschool programs. However, it can be helpful to work on listening skills in advance. Start by focusing on two step directions such as, "please wash your hands and then sit at the table" or, "please put the blocks in the basket and then choose a story". If your child can follow two-step directions at home, she will do very well when it comes to various activities and clean up time at preschool! Play games focused on listening skills: Simon Says, I Spy, and Red Light Green Light all teach little ones to stop and listen before making a choice.

**6. Classes:** Taking a couple of weekly classes will help your child work on social skills, circle time, and following directions. Most tumbling, music, and play classes for older toddlers and early preschoolers incorporate some version of "circle time" into the program. Learning to sit still is often one of the more difficult tasks of adjusting to preschool. Take advantage of these classes to give your child an idea of what circle time is all about.

**7. Playgroups:** The more kids practice basic social skills, the easier it is to navigate difficult situations when they arise. It's hard to share, but it's a necessary skill. Join or start a weekly playgroup (bonus if other kids in the class can join!) so that your child can get used to playing in groups. Try to step back and let your child work on sharing, verbalizing needs, and asking for help. Small groups are a great place to work on problem solving skills and seeking help from an adult. \*It can be helpful to send a different mother over when your child needs assistance sometimes to get her used to accepting help from others.

**8. Time away from mommy:** Particularly if your child has never been in daycare or with a regular babysitter or caregiver other than you, it is a good idea to start getting her used to being with other people a couple of months in advance. Start with a grandparent, aunt, or other familiar caregiver in short amounts of time. ½ hour is a good amount of time for a nervous first-timer, and then gradually increase the amount of time apart. \*\*Start using that goodbye ritual now! Preschoolers who are used to being with others tend to fare better when it comes to separation time, and mommies who get a break once a week are much less stressed. It's a win-win.

9. **Transitional objects:** Check with your preschool in advance to see what they allow, but sticking a lovey, comfort object, or family picture in your child's backpack or cubby can provide a little safety net when they need a little TLC. My daughter's preschool encourages children to bring a book from home to share each day. Having one of her favorite books at school with her helped her to feel more connected to home while at school.

10. **Books:** There are many great books to help kids prepare for school, but here are my two favorites: "The Kissing Hand" by Audrey Penn and "Llama Llama Misses Mama" by Anna Dewdney. Both tell the story of "preschool" animals nervous to be left behind without mommy and how they learned to separate. Read daily.

11. **Be honest about feelings:** Little kids have big feelings. Be honest about the fact that it's scary to be left behind. Label your child's feelings (scared, sad, angry). Talk about a time when you felt worried or sad and what you did to feel better. Help your child think of strategies to use when feeling lonely at school (talk to the teacher, draw a picture, ask to read a story). Labeling feelings and empathizing with your child will help her feel heard and understood, and providing strategies will decrease her fears about being alone.

12. **Don't be late!:** Being on time for pick-up is more important than you think. Kids know when the day is winding down, and it's hard to be the last one standing. Set an alarm if you have to, but make it a priority to be on time for pick-up. When parents are late on a regular basis, preschoolers feel like they've been forgotten. This will only decrease trust and prolong the separation anxiety. Being on time shows your child that she is important and that you will be there when she needs you! Preschool separation anxiety can be as hard for mommies as it is for kids. It's a big transition! A little preparation will go a long way...for both of you! Keep the smiles big and the goodbyes short and your little one will be transitioning well before you know it!

This information has been provided by **Four Plus an Angel** at:

<http://fourplusanangel.com/2011/06/preparing-for-school/#sthash.ZO8dsRwv.dpuf>