

13 Tips for Starting Preschool

By Diane Tunis, Rhonda Kleiner, and Fredda Band Loewenstein

Is your child entering a preschool program for the first time? Use these tips to help both you and your child make a smooth transition.

1. Visit your local library during a read-aloud time so your child gets used to hearing someone other than Mom, Dad, or Grandpa read aloud book in a group setting.
2. Establish a routine of "early to bed" and "school wake-up time" several weeks before school begins so your child has time to adjust to the new schedule.
3. Find out about the toileting procedures at the new school or center so you can review the situation with your child and make sure she is comfortable.
4. Arrange play dates with children who will be in your child's class. Usually moms or dads go along on these early play dates. Ask the teacher or school for a list of children who will be in your child's class.
5. If there's a home visit or school visiting day, make sure you and your child participate. If you aren't able to participate, call the school to arrange for a visit to the school and to meet your child's teacher.
6. Make a book at home about the new preschool experience your child is about to begin. Perhaps take photos of the school or of your child in front of school and add text like: "This is Sammy at school. This is her favorite t-shirt. This is Mommy picking up Sammy when school is over."
7. Let your child pick out a new backpack and together write her name on it.
8. Tell stories about when you went to school and share how you felt about it. Find childhood pictures of yourself and other adults in your child's life and talk about the photos.
9. If your child has never before been cared for by someone else, start to leave her for short periods of time with friends or relatives. Reinforce the fact that you will return and that she is safe with others.
10. Give your child a personal belonging of yours like a favorite scarf or bandanna so she knows you will come back to get it.
11. Read books about going to school and saying goodbye, such as
 - The Kissing Hand* by Audrey Penn
 - David Goes to School* by David Shannon
 - Will I Have a Friend?* by Miriam Cohen
 - First Day of School* by Anne Rockwell
 - When I Miss You* by Cornelia Maude Spelman
 - Take a Kiss to School* by Angela McAllister
 - It's Time for Preschool* by Esme Raj Codell
 - A Pocketful of Kisses* by Audrey Penn
12. Select a special object from home that your child can take to school-like a lunchbox, a book to share, and a small pillow for rest time.
13. Remember that separation is a process. Expect that your child (or yourself) will need time to feel comfortable with the new situation.