

Tips From Your School Psychologist

Helping Children Transition Into Kindergarten

Entering kindergarten is a big step for any child. Parents can help children adjust by anticipating their needs and preparing them for their new school environment. Ideally transition efforts should start the spring prior to your child's entrance into kindergarten. Most schools have a day where parents can bring their children in for a visit and for the parents to learn more about the school. The goal is to familiarize your child and yourself with the teacher, classroom, and school; provide the teacher opportunities to "get to know" your child and plan more effectively before he becomes a member of the class; and provide opportunities to become acquainted with the new teacher, class and school policies and procedures, as well as future classmates and their parents. This will, in turn, help the classroom teacher be ready for your child.

What to do before your child begins Kindergarten:

- Set up an initial meeting with the teacher. Although this can take place at school, home visits give your child the chance to meet the new teacher in his own environment. This can reduce anxiety later and strengthen the sense of home-school connection, and allow the teacher the opportunity to get a firsthand sense of your child's home environment.
- If possible, plan a visit to the new school that includes spending time with the teacher, exploring the classroom, and playing on the playground.
- Let the teacher know about your child's interests and strengths. Be specific. It will help the teachers know how to engage your child in the early weeks.
- Share any concerns or special considerations regarding your child, such as certain fears or food allergies.
- Use pictures and/or stories to familiarize your child with their new classroom, school and teacher.
- Be sure your child is in good physical and mental health. Schedule doctor and dental checkups early. Discuss with the pediatrician any concerns you have over your child's emotional or psychological development. The doctor can help determine if concerns are normal, age appropriate issues or that require further assessment. Children benefit if potential issues are identified and addressed early. (See "Considerations Regarding Children With Special Needs below)
- If your child has attended preschool, encourage communication between Kindergarten and preschool teachers, particularly if the child has special needs or particular issues coping in the classroom.

How to collaborate with the school once your child begins Kindergarten:

- Don't over-react if the first few days are a little rough. Young children in particular may experience separation anxiety or shyness initially but teachers should be trained to help them adjust. If your child cries at drop off, remain calm and positive. Do not linger but rather reassure your child that he will be okay and that you will be back soon. If your child has a negative reaction for a long period of time, meet with the teacher and school psychologist to develop a plan for transition time.
- During the first few weeks of school, teachers and parents should share information about how they think the child is adjusting to school. Email is often an effective way to communicate.
- If possible, volunteer in the classroom at least periodically throughout the year. Doing so helps children feel that their school and family life are linked. Being in the classroom is also a good way to develop a relationship with your child's teacher and classmates, and to get firsthand exposure to their classroom environment and routine. Most kindergarten teachers welcome even occasional parent help.
- Check your child's backpack daily for notes and fliers. These include important information and communication from the school.

Supporting learning before and after your child begins Kindergarten:

- Establish a schedule at home and stick to it. Children benefit from structure and this can help them better adjust to Kindergarten schedule.
- Work with your child on content related to colors, numbers, letters, etc. It is important to make the experience fun and playful. Preschool and Kindergarten teachers are excellent resources for ideas. Additional resources are listed below.
- Provide experiences with books, rhyming, singing, coloring, cutting, paying attention, sharing and sitting. Again, preschool and Kindergarten teachers can provide suggestions for fun and interesting ways to provide these experiences. The resources list below can also help with ideas.
- Find out what the Kindergarten classroom routines are and regularly discuss them with your child. When

appropriate, practice the routines by acting them out at home. For example, you can help your child practice waiting his turn, raising his hand, asking to go the bathroom, and asking a classmate to play.

- Plan to spend extra quiet one-on-one time with your child during the first weeks. Keep the family schedule as simple as possible to allow for your child's adjustment needs.
- Arrange play dates with a new friend (or friends) from school. Strengthening social bonds with classmates helps your child build a sense of familiarity and comfort level in school.
- Limit television and videogame time and increase book experiences.
- Be aware of differences in children's development and avoid making comparisons to siblings and other children.

Considerations Regarding Children With Special Needs

Transitioning to a Kindergarten that is governed by IDEA guidelines for eligibility and an Individual Education Plan (IEP) may require some adjustment. You will need to familiarize yourself with the law, the rights of your child, and the school's particular procedures. Schools can help by providing clear information (in multiple languages) online and in print and making it easy for parents to contact the relevant staff (i.e., school psychologist). This information is often on the school's website but, if not, call the main office and ask for office of special education or pupil services. Beginning this process prior to the start of school and with the goal of ongoing home-school collaboration is important.

Considerations Regarding Children who are English Language Learners

Children who are English Language Learners may need more time acclimating to the school setting. It is important for the school to provide parents with materials in their native language and to arrange for interpreters when they visit. If these are not yet available, parents should request them. Parents who do not speak English should also feel comfortable bringing a family member or friend to meetings to help interpret. Parents can also provide teachers with information about their culture and how the child will respond to the classroom. Parents are encouraged to continue speaking the family's native language in the home.

Considerations Regarding Children Who Did Not Attend Preschool

Children who did not attend preschool may need additional time practicing a schedule and interacting with peers. More than one visit to the classroom may also be appropriate for these children.

Resources:

Books

Mrs. Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten, Joseph Slate & Ashley Wolff.

The Night Before Kindergarten, Natasha Wing & Julie Durrell.

Look Out Kindergarten, Here I Come! Nancy Carlson.

What Do We Say? What Do We Do? Vital Solutions for Children's Educational Success and Creating Positive Home School Connections, Dorothy Rich.

Online Resources

Top 10 Signs of a Good Kindergarten: <http://www.naeyc.org/>

Tools You Can Use: www.nea.org/parents/tools/index.html

<http://www.education.com/grade/kindergarten/>