

Transitioning to Preschool

Going to preschool comes with many emotions, for both the parent and the child. For a child, entering a new preschool environment filled with unfamiliar teachers and kids can cause both anxiety and excitement. Parents might have mixed emotions about whether their child is ready for preschool. While acknowledging this important step your child is taking and providing support, too much emphasis on the change could make any anxiety worse. Young kids can pick up on their parents' nonverbal cues. When parents feel guilty or worried about leaving their child at school, the kids will probably sense that. The more calm and assured you are about your choice to send your child to preschool, the more confident your child will be (Head Start 2020).

Adjusting to a new environment can be stressful for children. It may involve strong feelings and emotions, such as sadness, fear, or excitement. Some children may express their emotions by withdrawing, crying, kicking, or rolling around on the floor. Individual differences also play a role in children's reactions to transition. While some children easily adjust to the new environment, others may need more time to warm up. Children's temperament and the intensity of their emotional reactions to different situations impact their adjustment during transition. Transitioning to a new learning environment may be particularly challenging for children who have a difficult time adapting to new situations and people in everyday life (Head Start 2020).

Easing Your Child's Fears

Children manage transition best when adults (Head Start 2020):

- Establish predictable routines and set clear expectations
- Help children learn how to manage and express their emotions
- Have realistic expectations of children based on their development and temperament
- Encourage and reinforce children's effective coping strategies
- Teach children strategies to handle stress and manage their actions and behavior

The First Day

If your child clings to you or refuses to participate in the class, don't get upset — this may only upset your child more. Always say a loving goodbye to your child, but once you do, leave promptly. As tempting as it may be, leaving without saying goodbye can make kids feel abandoned. A long farewell, on the other hand, might only reinforce a child's sense that preschool is a bad place.

A consistent and predictable farewell routine can make leaving easier. Some parents make a funny goodbye face, while others have a special handshake before parting.

Transitional objects — a family picture, or a favorite blanket — can also help comfort a child. Also, keep in mind that most kids do well after their parents leave.

Even when parents leave in a respectful and loving way, children still may cry. Remember that your child will learn that she can trust the adults in her life-and that she can trust herself. This is reaffirmed every day by the fact that you do, in fact, return (and that she does survive these separations). Eventually the tears will disappear and the routine of morning departure for parents and children will be smooth and happy (Nelsen, Erwin, & Duffy, 2007, p. 277).

Research indicates that children of all ages may display regressive behaviors for a few days or weeks during or after transition. They may show behavior they have already grown out of, such as temper tantrums, thumb sucking, potty accidents or bedwetting.

For additional reading:

[Supporting Transitions: Using Child Development as a Guide | ECLKC](#)

References

Head Start: Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center (2020). Supporting transitions: Using child development as a guide [Website]. Retrieved from <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/supporting-transitions-using-child-development-guide>

Nelsen, J., Erwin, C., & Duffy, R.A. (2007). *Positive discipline for preschoolers: For their early years-Raising children who are responsible, respectful, and resourceful*. Three Rivers Press. New York, NY.