



Starting Preschool

Adjusting to preschool can be tough for any child, even one who's been in daycare for a while. You can help ease your child's transition to preschool with these ideas and activities. The important thing is to keep any preparation time fun! At this age, learning should not be a chore. You don't want your child to feel like every activity is a lesson or every outing an educational field trip. These ideas come from preschool teachers and will help prepare your child to listen, follow directions, and get along in a group.

PLAN MORE SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

All preschool children have to get along with other children. If your child hasn't spent much time in a group with other children, then activities such as sharing, taking turns, and playing cooperatively can be very difficult. Help your child get used to being part of a group by arranging playdates with one or two peers or enrolling him or her in a music or tumbling class.

GIVE HIM/HER A SENSE OF WHAT TO EXPECT

It's the rare child who isn't at least a little anxious about starting preschool. Resist the temptation to say things like, "It will be the most fun you've ever had", or "There's nothing to be afraid of". Never belittle your child's fears or concerns, instead, help calm his/her fears with information. Talk to them about what to expect when they get to school, where they will be going, what they will be doing, and who will be in class with them. Before school begins, visit the classroom together at least once, preferably when other children and their future teacher(s) are there. You can also read stories about starting school. Some good ones to try are *FRANKLIN GOES TO SCHOOL*, by Paulette Bourgeois; *STARTING SCHOOL*, by Anne Civardi and Stephen Carwright, and *STARTING SCHOOL*, by Janet Ahlber.

PRACTICE LISTENING SKILLS

Preschool teachers often encourage their busy young students to sit still and listen. You can help your child prepare for this request by occasionally asking them to sit quietly and close their eyes. Then ask them to tell you all the different sounds he/she hears. Talk about what's making the sounds and where the sounds are coming from. In preschool, children also learn to listen and follow directions that involve more than one step. Start asking your child to do a series of things, such as take his shoes to his room and then put them in the closet. Or, go to the bathroom and wash their hands and then come and help you set the dinner table. You can also play games that require your child to listen to directions, solve problems, and take turns. For instance, play I Spy in the car or on walks around your neighborhood. Give hints about something you see, "I spy with my little eye something that is...tall." Your child has to ask you questions about the object until they guess what it is. Simon Says, is another good listening-and-direction-following game.

COME UP WITH A GOOD-BYE RITUAL

If this is the first time your child will be away from you, he/she may worry that you're not coming back, or that you'll get lost and won't be able to find your way back to the school to pick him/her

up at the end of the day. Invent a special parting ritual-such as a high five, or saying something like, "I'll get back to you soon, long before we see the moon"- then you do them each time you drop him/her off. During the first few days, allow extra time to get them ready and out the door in the morning, too. The more calm things are at home, the easier the separation will be. Though you might be tempted to sneak out without so much as a wave when you drop them off, DON'T DO IT. They will only be more distressed when they realize you're gone. Instead, make a point of saying good-bye. Don't drag it out or let on that you might be upset too. Just do it matter-of-factly and confidently and they will learn to do the same.

READ TO YOUR CHILD EVERYDAY

Most preschool classes have at least one reading period each day. Setting aside at least 15 minutes a day for reading time will make this a familiar ritual when school begins. Children who don't have early experiences with books often have difficulty learning to read later. Since preschoolers don't read independently, they need to learn to listen. Reading aloud to your child is a great way to help him develop listening skills. Stories with rhythm are particularly engaging, so look for books that repeat phrases. When they start remembering the phrases, ask them to "read" with you. For instance, if you read the Three Little Pigs, after the wolf says, "Little Pig, let me in..." let your child fill in the next line, "not by the hair on my chinny-chin-chin." Your child will also learn to predict the outcome of a story in preschool. To help them prepare for this, you can stop midway through a reading and question them about what they think will happen next, or how they think the story will end.

NURTURE THE ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

Creating art-whether it's finger-painting or molding clay- helps preschoolers develop the visual and fine motor skills they need to write. Keep paper, paints, available so they can create whenever they want. Doing simple mazes and connect-the-dot-pictures will also help your child develop beginning writing skills. If you have any other questions or concerns, please feel free to talk to your child's teacher, we are here to help and come alongside you.