

Four Tips for Preparing You and Your Child for Kindergarten

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The first day of Kindergarten is just around the corner for excited 4-, 5-, and 6-year-olds. There are things you can do to help children transition to a new school and many unknowns and expectations. Some children will adapt quickly to a classroom filled with strangers and new rules, while others will be cautious and need time to feel comfortable and safe. Leaving a nurturing pre-school teacher, parent, grandparent, or nanny is a big change and developmental task for all children.

Here's some food for thought as you prepare yourself and your child for change.

Understand Your Child's Temperament:

Temperament is a child's natural response to the world. Some children love new situations, people, and adventures, and will kiss you goodbye and happily explore the classroom. If your child is sensitive and slow-to-adapt you're likely to deal with clinging, tears, other signs of worry, or even out-and-out panic. Reflect on your child's behavioral style and be prepared. To do a free on-line temperament assessment to help you be pro-active, go to www.preventiveoz.org.

Attend to What You Say and How You Listen:

Present the idea of Kindergarten in a positive light, with enthusiasm and some specific things your child will do and learn. Don't let children hear you express your concerns about the teacher or curriculum to friends or relatives. Kids pick up on the anxieties and fears adults feel. Read books and play games about school. Give children a chance to ask questions. In your desire to have things go well, don't dismiss their feelings. Acknowledge and accept concerns, and give reassurance that the school is ready for them.

Visit the School, Playground, and Potential Schoolmates:

During the summer visit the school, even if you can't go in. Walk around the yard and talk about what you see. If the school is open show your child where the bathrooms and other important landmarks are. If you can get a list of students try to set up a picnic or potluck so children can meet each other before the first day. This is particularly helpful for children who are introverted or are new to the area without friends. It's also a great way for parents to meet each other. Arrange a play date with classmates before school starts.

On the First Day:

Feed children a healthy breakfast after a good night of sleep. Follow cues regarding how long to stay at your child's side in the classroom. When you say goodbye it's important to leave without making a big deal. Do your best to hold back your tears for when you're out of sight. If children feel apprehensive and want to bring something from home, let them put it in their backpack. Tell them when you'll be picking them up, and spend a little time playing on the yard with your child when school is out.

You may help children learn how to write their names, count to ten, and continue to practice taking turns, but don't forget to let children play and have fun as summer ends. Happy and healthy children will do well in adjusting to school, at their own pace.