

Your Child's First Day in Preschool



A child's first day at child care or preschool can be challenging—for both child and parents! Here are some tips for easing those first-day blues from parents who've lived through the experience.

Make an appointment to visit the program with your child before she starts.

- Help your child list things she wants to find out about the program. For example, she might want to know the teachers' names, where the restroom is, and whether the class takes naps. Take the list along on your visit.
- Arrange to meet staff members and children so your child will know a few people by name.
- Ask what the staff does to help families prepare for a child's first days. Do teachers make home visits? Are family members welcome to stay in the classroom with the child during the first week or two? Can children bring comfort items (such as teddy bears or family photographs) to keep close at hand?
- After the visit, talk with your child about what you found out. For example, did he find the restroom? Did he learn the teachers' names?

Plan ahead for a smooth first day.

- Several days before your child begins the new program, start a “countdown” with him by marking the days off on a calendar. Invite him to help you collect his school supplies. Let him decide what to wear and what to take for lunch.
- Make sure your child knows how she will get to and from the program—for example, in the car with you or another relative, in a car pool, or on a yellow bus.

Create healthy habits for saying goodbye.

- Begin with simple departure rituals that are meaningful in your family. Your child may want you to hug her and remind her that she will be home again at the end of the day. Or she might want some other interaction with you—sharing a joke or deciding together which activity she will try first, for example.
- If your child feels distressed when you leave, let him know that you understand that he might miss his family while he is at school, but you are sure those feelings will pass, and he will feel better after a time.
- If you bring your child into the classroom, NEVER leave without letting her know you are going, even if you know that she will be upset when you go. Tell staff members that you must leave; they can comfort her and get her interested in an activity.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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