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POSITIVE PARENTING | BY DEBBIE GLASSER

How to smooth the way for 1st preschool day

Soon many young children will be starting preschool. While this is an exciting time, it can bring on a few jitters for children -- and their parents. If your child is about to take those first big steps to preschool, here are some ways you can make the adjustment a happy and successful one:

- **Introduce routines.** During the next few weeks, you might want to establish consistent bedtime and morning routines to prepare your child for the new school schedule. For example, if preschool starts at 8 a.m., and your child usually sleeps later than that, gradually wake her earlier to ease the adjustment.
- **Plan ahead.** Show your child books and videos about children attending preschool. Talk about preschool, and be specific. For example, instead of simply saying, "Preschool will be fun," you can say, "In preschool, you will sing songs, draw pictures, play with other children and go on a playground."
- **Encourage familiarity.** Drive by your child's school and say, "Look. There's Sophia's new school!" It also can be helpful to take a tour of the new school together. Call ahead to arrange a visit.
- **Help with transitions.** A typical day in preschool includes many transitions: Shifting from indoor play to the playground, snack time to story time, and leaving parents and greeting friends. At home, there's a lot you can do to help your child feel comfortable with transitions. Before you shift gears, let your child know what's coming next. For example, "After we clear the table, it will be bath time." Or, "After your nap, we'll go to the store."
- **Practice separations.** If your little one has had limited experiences in the care of others, consider asking a caregiver, family member or friend to stay with your child while you spend some time away from him or her. Start slowly and work your way to longer separations. Another way you can help your child adjust to new separations is to introduce a gradual transition to preschool -- or shorter days, at first.
- **Give a good start.** Allow plenty of time in the morning for your child to have a nutritious breakfast and to get dressed. Offer choices about what he or she wants to wear or what to bring in the lunchbox. For example, "Do you want to wear your orange shirt or your yellow one?"
- **Dress the part.** Preschool is a messy place filled with art, outdoor play and other fun activities. Dress your child in clothes that are easy to clean and easy to replace.
- **Offer security.** During times of transition, some toddlers seek comfort from "loveys" such as blankets, dolls or other special items. During the first days of school, your child might find comfort in these items as he or she adjusts to the new environment.
- **Communicate with the teacher.** Share information about allergies or medical conditions with the teacher and staff. Also, share your child's interests with the teacher so she can get to know him or her better. For example, "Isabelle loves airplanes. She would love looking for them when she's in the playground." Or, "When he's thirsty, Mikey will say, 'ade' for lemonade. That might mean he is ready for a drink." Let the teacher know how your child seeks comfort during challenging times.
- **Promote positive discipline and social skills.** While teachers have many opportunities to guide behavior in the classroom, you are your child's first and most influential teacher. Set limits at home and encourage positive behavior. Also, find opportunities for your child to interact with peers and practice taking turns, sharing and resolving conflicts. Provide appropriate guidance as your child gradually learns these new skills. For additional information and support, enroll in a positive discipline class or workshop. These are offered in a variety of settings including churches, synagogues, preschools and universities.
- **Be positive.** When it's time to say goodbye, give reassuring hugs and smiles, wish your son or daughter a happy day

and explain that you'll be back after school. Your playful preschooler might enjoy a silly or special ritual to say goodbye. For example, "I'm going to put three kisses in your pocket so you can take them out later in the day. One. Two. Three!" Or, "Let's do a big bearhug. How hard can you squeeze?"

- **Get involved.** Attend parent-teacher conferences and family events at school. Be a partner in your child's education, now and throughout his or her life. Work together with your child's teacher to ensure that your young preschooler is adjusting well and enjoying a happy, successful experience.

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