

Starting preschoolers off on the right foot.

The first few weeks of preschool can be difficult for both children and parents. It is a time of intense emotions for everyone. Starting preschool can be a big change for a child, especially if he or she has never been in a daycare setting. Try to avoid having a lot of other changes occurring at the same time, such as moving to a new bedroom or starting potty training.

Toddlers and preschoolers are notorious dawdlers, especially in the morning. Attempt to prepare clothes, breakfast and snacks the night before to make the morning run more smoothly. You may want to consider an earlier rising time to allow for pokey eaters and dressers. Try to remember that a frenzied rush in the morning will send both you and your child out the door on the wrong foot.

Your child may or may not have difficulty separating from you at school. Try to remain calm at drop off time, as your child can sense your anxiety and may become more upset.

Never sneak out and leave your child, as this will only intensify any separation anxiety.

Establish your own special drop off routine, whether it be bear hugs or butterfly kisses.

"The Kissing Hand" by Audry Penn is a wonderful story to read and imitate with your child. It describes a mother raccoon whom eases her child's transition into school by sealing a kiss into his hand that he can carry with him all day.

Try not to give in to your child's distress over your leaving. Explain that this school is for kids, not grownups. Be very concrete about when you will return for him i.e. before lunch or after nap time, rather than "at 12 o'clock". Acknowledge that it's okay for him to be sad and miss you, but that you have to leave. Of course, not every child is emotionally ready for preschool. A skilled teacher will be able to recognize an unusual level of distress and offer suggestions as to help to manage it.