

early years are learning years

Back to school time—Tips to help children adjust

Back to school time often means changes for children and families: the first day of kindergarten or first grade; new preschools or child care settings; new classrooms and new teachers. Making smooth transitions between home, programs and schools can help children feel good about themselves and teach them to trust other adults and children. Helping children adapt to new situations can ease parents' minds and give them a chance to become involved in their children's education.

Transitions are exciting opportunities for children to learn and grow. Parents and early childhood professionals share a role in making children feel safe and secure as they move to new educational settings. Of course, such milestones in children's lives can cause anxiety, too. Strengthening the ties between programs and families will help create smooth transitions for adults and children both.

How parents can help:

- 1** Be enthusiastic about the upcoming change. If you are excited and confident, your child will be, too.
- 2** Prepare yourself. Take note of how your child reacts to separation. If possible, visit the new setting with your child. Introduce your child to the new teacher or early childhood professional in advance.
- 3** Arrange a play-date with another child from the program, preferably one-on-one, so that your child will see a familiar face when she walks in.

4 Start daily routines that will add to continuity. Let your child become involved with packing lunch or laying out clothes. Also, begin an earlier bedtime several weeks before.

5 Put aside extra time, particularly on the first day, for chatting and commuting together. But remember not to prolong the good-bye. If the child whines or clings, staying will only make it harder.

6 Always say good-bye to your child. Be firm, but friendly about separating. Never ridicule a child for crying. Instead, make supportive statements like, "it's hard to say good-bye."

7 At the end of the work day, put aside your concerns and focus on being a parent.

How teachers or early childhood professionals can help:

1 Make sure activities are developmentally appropriate for children. Interesting and challenging, but doable, activities will help children feel comfortable in their new setting.

2 Make an effort to get to know each individual child as quickly as possible. Parents can provide information about children's likes, dislikes, and special interests.

3 Welcome suggestions from families, particularly those of children with special needs. Parents can offer specific suggestions they have found useful for their own child, and advise on classroom set-up and modifications.

4 Hold an orientation for children and parents. Small groups will make it easier for children to get to know each other.

5 Show children around the new school or program, introducing them to other adults who are there to help them become acclimated.

6 Create partnerships between preschools and elementary schools in the community. Meetings may focus on the sharing of ideas and concerns.

7 Set up an area for photos of parents and family members that children may "visit" throughout the day. Also include items that reflect the cultural experience of all children to help promote a sense of mutual respect and understanding.

Children, just like adults, need time to adjust to new people and situations. Experience can make transition a bit easier, but even with experience, change can still be stressful. Patience and understanding on the part of parents and teachers or caregivers will help children learn how to approach new situations with confidence—a skill that will help them make successful transitions all through life.

For a free copy of NAEYC's brochure, So many good-byes, send a SASE to NAEYC, 1509 16th St., NW, Washington, DC, 20036-1426. Specify box #573.



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