
Tips for Staff:
Preparing Children for the Transition to School

We have a responsibility to ensure that children leaving our programs have all the pre-academic skills they need for success in school, but we can also support children with their emotional readiness for formal schooling. Whether they are entering kindergarten or first grade, helping children know what to expect goes a long way.

Children’s Books about Going to School: One way to help prepare children for the school experience is to read children’s fictional books about school. A few suggestions follow and you probably have lots of favorites yourself that you could add to this list.

- Rey, M. & H.A. *Curious George Goes to School*. An old favorite, this tale of a monkey going to school helps children view curiosity in a positive way.
- Kraus, R. *Leo the Late Bloomer*. This story about a family of lions shows an appreciation for the idea that everyone develops at their own pace.
- Penn, A. *The Kissing Hand*. A mother raccoon offers her child a special gift to help her son through the first days of school.

Encourage and respond to children’s questions: Learn as much as you can about the schools the children in your homebase will be transitioning to, then encourage questions. You can start with an open-ended question such as “What do you want to know about going to school next year?” Be prepared that you may have to prompt children, or they may have lots of spontaneous questions. Be prepared to answer questions like:

“What do I do if I have to go to the bathroom?”

“What if I get lost at my new school and can’t find my room?”

“Do you get to play outside?”

Language Game: What can I expect?: Just as adults learn from sample scenarios, children do too. Play a language game where you begin a story about going to school and let the children add on to it. This activity not only helps children anticipate getting ready for school, but also improves listening and oral language skills. For example, you might say, “Lewis was excited and a little scared about riding the yellow school bus for the first time. He knew that he had to be at his bus stop by a certain time and that if he wasn’t there the bus wouldn’t wait. His Dad thought it might be good to practice getting to the bus stop in the morning. Here is what they did. . .” (Have children take turns filling in the next parts of the story.)

Dramatic Play: The children in your homebase may enjoy acting out school scenarios in the dramatic play area. Think about and provide props that would support this play including chalkboards and chalk, lined paper and pencils, easy reader books, table and chairs, etc. Be sure to spend some time in this area interacting with children and prompting the discussion.

Add your own favorite ideas for helping children prepare emotionally for the transition to school. This is an important transition and your support can help to make it a smooth one.

Reference: Wesley, P.W. (2001). *Smooth Moves to Kindergarten*. Chapel Hill, NC: Chapel Hill Training Outreach Project, Inc.

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