

Preparing for Preschool

Counting Down to the Big Day

By [Amanda Rock](#), About.com Guide

You wouldn't move to a new neighborhood without checking it out first. You wouldn't start a new job without going to orientation. You wouldn't buy a new car without test driving it. Any monumental occasion in our lives usually has some sort of preparation period preceding it. It's the same with your child and preschool. The first step on your child's educational journey, preschool is the beginning of an amazing adventure of learning and discovery. To help make the [transition](#) as easy as possible, take some steps ahead of time to prepare your child.

Help Your Child Do His Research

Many children experience [anxiety](#) about starting preschool and it's mainly because they aren't quite sure what it is. Talk about what she'll be learning at school, why it's important and how much fun she's going to have. Talk about how she'll be playing games, making crafts, singing songs and meeting lots of new friends. Be sure to tell her that you will be there (or name the person who will be) to pick her up as soon as school is over.

Playing "school" is a great way to help your child understand how preschool works and what will go on while he is there. Try to cover every little thing -- even stuff like hanging up her coat and backpack. You can even review basic "academics" -- colors, shapes, the alphabet and numbers 1-10. Make sure she knows his first and last name. If she bristles at all -- stop. These things aren't important yet and you don't want to add any extra apprehension.

If your child will be riding the bus to preschool, find out if the school will arrange for a test run. If not, be sure to point buses out whenever you see them. It's not the same, but if you can, try taking your child a public bus ride just so they get the idea. When school starts make a point of introducing your child to the bus driver, making sure your child knows the driver's name and bus number.

Check Out the Library

The library or your local bookstore offers a wealth of knowledge. Books are a great way to teach your child about what will be awaiting her. There are [plenty of great books](#) designed to help your preschooler get ready for the first day. Ask your local librarian or your child's preschool teacher to recommend some titles. Good starts include *My First Day at Nursery School* (Bloomsbury) by Becky Edwards, illustrated by Anthony Flintoft, and *What to Expect at Preschool* (HarperFestival) by Heidi Eisenberg Murkoff, illustrated by Laura Rader.

Choose titles that are about preschool but also touch on [separation](#). Talk about the characters and how they must be feeling and what your child would do if he was in their place. If your child wants to keep rereading the same book, indulge him. This is how youngsters tend to work through anxiety.

Your local library may also host special programs designed to get your child ready. Ask at the children's desk for more information.

Be Proactive

How comfortable do you feel walking into a room of strangers? Probably not at all. This is how your child feels. But with a little mom or dad networking you may be able to help them to seek out a friendly face by finding out who will be in your child's class. Make a couple of phone calls to parents you know and find out if they or anyone else they know will have children at your child's preschool. Once you have some names, see if you can arrange for a play date. This way, he won't feel so alone when he walks into that great big classroom on the first day.

If you aren't able to find any children that will be in your child's class, don't worry. Talk to your child and relay stories of your own youth and how you made friends when you went to school. Explain how that's one of the best parts of going to school. Hearing a parent share an experience often helps children get over their fear if they realize that you once felt just like they did.

Do A Site Visit

Bring your child to the preschool that he'll be attending. The teachers will welcome the opportunity to meet your child and show him around. This will give your child a better idea of what preschool is and where he'll be going. If you can, take a camera with you and take some photos. This will help your child remember what he saw, and he'll be able to show off his new school to friends and relatives.

Make sure you hit the playground and the bathroom while you are there so she knows where these very important places are. Let her test them both out. If your child wears pants with buttons, make sure she knows how to undue them so she doesn't get stressed when she has to go to the bathroom. Find out from the teachers if they have a schedule in place. Will the children take naps? You may want to have your child lie down at the same time. What types of snack do they serve? Pick up the same stuff at the [grocery store](#). When you get home, talk about what you saw. Encourage your child to share his thoughts with you, either by talking or even by drawing a picture.

If you can visit the school more than once, do it. And be sure to smile whenever you are there. If your child sees that you are happy, they are likely to follow your example and smile too.

Some schools even arrange for a home visit by the preschool teacher. This may be something you'd like to take advantage of. Having the teacher come to your child's home turf may make your little one feel more at ease.

Retail Therapy

Hit the back-to-school sales. Letting your child pick out her own backpack and school supplies like crayons and safety scissors (even if they aren't needed at school) will make her feel like a big kid. Let her choose an outfit or two, picking something special to wear on the first day.

If she wants to use her new swag right away go ahead and let her. The more comfortable she feels, the better. In fact, it's a good idea to have her practice zipping and unzipping her backpack and lunchbox until she gets the hang of it. Have her practice with her coat as well.

Pack the backpack with some small comfort items -- a beloved stuffed animal or a favorite family photo. If your child is staying for lunch, be sure to pack an easy-to-decipher note (draw a picture of a heart or a smiley face) and put lots of stickers on it.

Make Your Home School-Ready

About a week before the big day, start putting your child to bed at her regular, school bedtime. And wake her up at the time you would when she goes to school. Go through the whole routine from bed making to [teeth](#) brushing to breakfast. Anything that you want done before you leave. This will help your child's internal clock set and get on a school schedule.

Find out from the teachers at your site visit -- is there a particular song they sing at cleanup time? Is there a hand washing routine before snack or lunch? Incorporate all of these schedule nuances into your own day. It will make the [transition](#) much easier for your preschooler.

Pre-pack your child's backpack and pick out the first day of school outfit. If she'll be bringing lunch and/or snack, now is a good time to figure out what will go in the lunchbox either the day before or that [morning](#).

It's normal for both you and your preschooler to feel some apprehension as [the first day of preschool](#) approaches but before you know it, the last day of preschool will be on the horizon. Time does pass quickly -- wasn't your child just born last week?