

Childcare and Parenting **12** Series

Getting Ready for Preschool



Online Version



Family Health Service
Department of Health

When your child reaches the age of two or three, you may consider enrolling him in a preschool. Apart from choosing a suitable preschool, helping your child adjust to the life there is important. Before starting preschool, there are things you can do to facilitate your child's adjustment.

How to Choose a Preschool

The aim of pre-primary education is to provide an environment to foster children's balanced development in the social, emotional, cognitive and physical aspects, taking into account their individual learning needs. Preschool provides a relaxing and pleasurable environment wherein children learn how to follow rules, get along and communicate ideas and emotions with others. Healthy social development will enhance other aspects of learning in children.

1. Qualifications of Teachers and Manning Ratio

The kindergarten teachers or childcare workers should possess recognized qualifications. They need to be warm and responsive to children. The government has set regulations on the teacher/worker to child ratio. It would be easier for the teacher/worker to attend to individual needs of each child if there are fewer under their care.

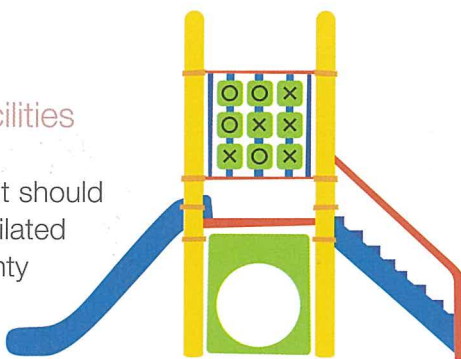


2. The Curriculum

The curriculum should aim at facilitating learning through play and exploration. It should meet the developmental needs of children and cater for their varying abilities. Putting too much emphasis on academic work is unnecessary. For example, it would be inappropriate to start teaching children to write before their fine motor development is ready around 4 years of age.

3. Environment and Facilities

The physical environment should be hygienic, well-lit, ventilated and child-proof, with plenty of space for various activities. It should be well-equipped with the necessary teaching aids to provide a rich learning environment.



4. Location and Distance from Home

Going to a nearby preschool will save your child from tiredness arising from traveling. If traveling is necessary, arrangement has to be made to minimize possible stress.

Before enrollment, you can learn more about the preschool by going to visit it, observing children there learn, talking to teachers and parents.

Preparation for Starting Preschool

When starting preschool, it may be hard for a toddler to part with his familiar caregiver and go to a place with strangers, new routines and instructions. Preparing a few months ahead may help smooth out the adjustment process:

1. Encouraging Basic Self Care

Encourage the child to learn basic self care like putting on clothes, going to the toilet or tidying up. This will enhance his independence and self-confidence in coping with preschool life.

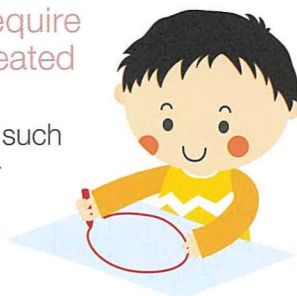


2. Establishing Simple Rules and Routines at Home

Set up simple rules at home; let the child learn how to follow instructions and change activities upon request.

3. Promoting Activities that Require Your Child to be Quiet and Seated

Let your child get used to activities such as listening to stories, drawing or art and craft which require him to sit down and pay attention for a while.



4. Creating Opportunities to Mix with Other Children



Take your child to the playground, the park, birthday parties, or to visit neighbours. Let him mix with other children, learn to share and take turns.

5. Overcoming Separation Anxiety

Your child may feel anxious upon separating from parents or his main caregiver. To help her overcome the separation anxiety when starting preschool, practice separation in advance:



- ★ Find a baby-sitter your child likes. While she is settled in an interesting activity together with the baby-sitter, tell her you are going to leave for a while, where you are going and when you will return. Then say goodbye to her. Since she has not yet developed accurate time concept, you may associate the time with specific activities or routines to help her understand, like 'Mummy will be back after you have dinner.' Keep your promise and be back on time. Initially, leave her for just a few minutes. Then gradually lengthen the separation time. To strengthen her sense of security, you may leave your belongings such as your coat with her and ask her to keep it for you until you are back.
- ★ When interacting with your child, avoid using threatening words that will arouse anxiety towards being abandoned (e.g. 'I don't want you anymore' or 'Get out of the door'), or that will associate school with unpleasant feelings (e.g. 'I'll tell your teacher to punish you').

6 Exposing Your Child to Interesting School Life

- ★ Visit the nursery or kindergarten in the neighbourhood with your child. You may take him with you when you send your elder children to school. Reading or telling him stories about interesting school life can also arouse his interest.



★ Before school starts, familiarize your child with the route to school. Play going to school with him. Let him put on the school uniform and carry the new school bag in pretense.



★ Attending the orientation programme is a good opportunity for your child to get to know the school environment. He can meet the teacher and try using the school facilities. This will help reduce his anxiety in a new setting and give him a good impression of the school.

★ Try to take a short period off from work and accompany him to school for the initial period. Some preschools encourage parents to stay with their children in class for the orientation period (lasting for a few days or weeks). The time will be progressively shortened to introduce the child to the new school life and allow him to adjust to separation from parents.



Be prepared for minor problems in school despite what you have done. It is common for children to cry, move out of their seats, snatch toys, be restless or temporarily regress in behaviours (e.g. bedwetting or babyish clinging). Keeping frequent contact with the teacher to understand his adjustment in school and establishing partnership with the school to meet his needs will help your child lead a happy school life.



Family Health Service

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