

Preparing Your Child For Care

You know your child best. Consider her temperament, age, and prior child care experience to help you figure out the best way to prepare her for a new child care experience. Here are some ways to make the transition easier for your child. Remember that children feel more secure and comfortable with people and places they have seen before. If possible, try to:

- Visit the program or provider with your child at least once before care is to begin. Ideally, let your child meet the teachers or provider, play with the other children and explore the rooms.
- Ask the teacher or provider how they transition children into the program. If possible, start your child slowly with several partial days of care, rather than beginning with a full day of care.
- Explain to your child exactly what will happen on the first few days. Ask the teacher or provider about daily schedules, special activities, etc. so you can tell your child what to expect.
- Talk to your child about their feelings of sadness and/or excitement. Don't worry if your child has anxieties about the new situation; try to be reassuring to your child, and let him know that you care about how he feels, while telling him that he will have the chance to make new friends, learn new things, and have a lot of fun while you are at work or in school.
- Read books with your child on the topic of starting new child care.
- Knowing that you (or another beloved adult) will come back at a certain time is reassuring to your child. If you can, keep pickup time consistent (e.g., every afternoon after snack time, or every evening at 5:30). This helps your child to feel secure. He can form routines and relax into his day once the pattern is established.
- Take some snapshots of yourself and the rest of your family, including pets, and even of your family's home, to the provider. Your child can find comfort in seeing and talking about these pictures with her teacher or the other children. Let your child paste these pictures into a "book", maybe with the names of each person and pet, and a few lines about each one. Some centers have a "book" for each child.
- Talk to other parents that have recently transitioned their child into care for ideas that have worked for them and their children. For example, some children like to draw pictures or make other gifts for their parents. Talking about their parents while making the picture can be very helpful to a child. Teachers can help by talking about a child's home and family with the child and reassuring her that she will go home every day.
- Try to have as few other changes as possible in your child's life during transition time. If you are expecting a baby, try to start your child's care well before the baby is due so your older child does not feel he was "pushed out" by the new baby. Some simultaneous changes are unavoidable, of course, such as when you move to a new city and a new home, and your child must start a new child care program all at the same time. So many changes can be overwhelming to a young child; try to be extra patient with his fears or anxieties. Your reassuring tone will help your child to feel safe and secure in his new environment more quickly.
- Always say goodbye to your child before leaving him at child care. Reassure him that you will be back at the end of the day. If someone else will pick him up, let him know who and when.
- Greet your child warmly and happily at the end of the day; let her know you are glad to see her again and that you are looking forward to spending the evening together at home.