Saying Goodbye to Home and Hello to School

Your child may be starting child care at a new provider or starting child care for the first time. You may be preparing your child for their first day of VPK or kindergarten or even first grade. This can be a challenging time for you and your child if they are having a difficult time separating from you. Anything new can be scary for your child and the fact that you will not be there to help them adjust to their new surroundings may make it scary for you, too. Home-to-school transitions worries may be caused by your child not understanding that she will have fun and be safe in her new environment until you return to take her home.

Separation anxiety is common in young children and parents as well. Before the first day your child goes to a new school or is in a class with a new teacher, ask the school staff or program director what they do at the beginning of the year to help make the first day go smoothly. Find out the name of your child’s teacher and other adults who may be supervising your child. 

continued on page 5
A Healthy Start for School

No matter what the age of your child, it is important to make sure your child is healthy and is up-to-date on all of their vaccinations before they start attending school or child care. Well-child visits help you keep your child healthy and ready to learn as they begin school or child care. Having vaccinations protects your child and helps keep other children and family members, who may not be able to have vaccinations, healthy. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends every child receive care through a family-centered medical home where your child’s development and medical history will be tracked on a regular basis. You may want to keep a record of all of the developmental milestones your child achieves as they grow. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers a free app for tracking your child’s developmental milestones as well as videos and pictures of children engaged in activities that show the milestones and checklists for all ages, birth to 6 years. If you find your child has any delays in their development, the CDC has additional resources to help you find support for your child and family.

Don’t forget about your child’s dental health. Starting at birth, your child needs you to use a soft washcloth to clean their gums after feedings and needs to visit a dentist by their first birthday. Continue to take your child to the dentist for regular checkups. AAP has a program promoting healthy nighttime routines reminding you to start 30 minutes before your child’s bedtime to brush your child’s teeth, read them a book and tuck them into bed using safe sleep practices. Using this nighttime routine promotes good health and helps your child settle in for a good night’s sleep, ready to start school or child care the next morning.

Special Dates in September

Hispanic Heritage Month  Sept. 4 Eat Extra Dessert Day
Sept. 5 Cheese Pizza Day  Sept. 6 Read a Book Day
Sept. 8 National Grandparents Day  Sept. 11 Make your Bed Day
Sept. 12 Chocolate Milkshake Day  Sept. 13 Positive Thinking Day
Sept. 21 National Cleanup Day  Sept. 23 Checkers Day  Sept. 25 Comic Book Day
Sept. 25 Dads, Take Your Child to School Day  Sept. 28 Good Neighbor Day
Encouraging Independence in your Preschooler

It’s August and many children are starting back to school. Your child is growing up and becoming more independent. Here are five tips that will help you support your preschoolers’ independence.

- **Personal and Family Responsibilities**
  A great way to support independence is by stepping back and allowing them to do things on their own. An example of this is giving personal responsibilities like small household chores that help the family.

- **Problem Solving and Consequences**
  When a problem comes up, teaching your child to identify what the problem is and discussing ways to solve the problem is a skill your child will need for their whole life. Encouraging your child to solve problems prepares them to face consequences. Consequences help children understand what happens when they do something wrong or make someone feel sad.

- **Don’t Expect Perfection**
  Let’s face it, mistakes happen! Mistakes provide opportunities for you to teach the correct way to do something in a caring and loving way. This approach allows your child to gain confidence and encourages them to become more responsible.

- **Establish Routines**
  A routine is when specific tasks are completed on a regular basis. Children thrive with routines because it creates structure. A child must have the routine and tasks explained to them and see it modeled by you in order to follow the routine regularly. Children often need more time to complete a task. Giving them a little extra time to complete tasks will help your child learn to follow the routine faster. With lots of guided practice the routine will become automatic for them.

- **Praise**
  Children love being acknowledged for the things they do. When your child does something independently give them praise. When your child tries something for the first time independently and they make a mistake, give them praise for trying. When mistakes happen encourage your child to try again. Another great way to praise your child is through rewards. Rewards are a physical representation of your praise.

At the beginning of a new school year your child will experience a lot of new routines at school. Support your child in becoming more independent by asking your child about some of the routines they are learning at school and have them practice those routines at home.
Learning at Home

With the start of a new school year, you may be anxious to find easy activities to help your child continue their learning at home. There are many activities you can use at home to extend or support the skills your child is learning at school or child care. The Florida Office of Early Learning (OEL) has a variety of resources for families on their website such as the Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards (FLbt5). These standards show you the knowledge and skills that a child should know and be able to do at the end of an age-related time-frame. Related activities for each skill are located on the Families page for the standards and will help you support your child’s learning and development from birth to age five.

On the Families page, you select the age of your child and see the standards for their age. In addition to the standards, you can access the First Teacher Books, activity ideas or Vroom tips for the specific age of your child. There are videos related to activities for the standards or websites with useful information and activities to do with your child.

The Back to School page on the website has resources to assist you in preparing your child for school or child care. If your child is starting Florida’s Voluntary Prekindergarten Education program (VPK), there are tips and resources for families with VPK children. There is a Transition to Kindergarten page with resources specific to kindergarten readiness if your child is ready to start kindergarten.
Saying Goodbye... continued...

Talk with your child about the new people they will meet on their first day and what each person does at the school. Share information with the school about your family and culture. It is especially important to give the school as much information as possible about your child if they do not speak English, if English is not their home language or if your child has special needs or a special diet.

Role-play saying good-bye at home letting your child pretend to be the parent and you pretend to be the child. You can say things that allow your child to process their feelings and emotions in the safety of your home before they have to tell you goodbye at school with others watching. “Why do you have to go and leave me here?” or “I don’t like it here!” helps them think about the your reasoning while you express the emotions or feelings they may have.

Check with the school or teacher and ask if children can bring a personal item from home or a picture of their parents or family members to keep at school so they can use it to comfort themselves when they feel anxious or scared. Some child care providers ask parents to record themselves talking or singing to their child and will ask their child if they want to listen to mommy or daddy’s voice when they feel scared or anxious.

Go over their schedule and explain that you will pick them up from school after outside play or after art and music time. This helps your child begin to sequence time and match time with objects they see or activities they do at school.

Some things make it easier to say goodbye and leave with your child and you smiling instead of crying. Find what works best for your child and family to help your child make a smooth transition to school.