

Parents = the Difference

a monthly parenting newsletter

With a full month of school under our belts, it's time to take a collective breath. Children are beginning to get the idea that school is a regular experience but we still have work to do to help them adjust. Please take a look at the **parent/child activity calendars** distributed monthly in 5 languages. The activities are based on the New York State Prekindergarten Standards (www.p12.nysed.gov/earlylearning/standards/documents/PKStandards2019accessibility.pdf). Many of the activities are age appropriate for our 3-year-olds as well. Connecting school with home by doing some of the activities is a good way to support your child's classroom learning. Plus, they are just plain fun!

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In the Whole New World that is School

Adapted from http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/starting_school.html



As you already know, your child has needed a fair amount of support during this first month of school. For some children, the pandemic created anxiety about being away from the comfort of family. Here are simple things you can continue to do to help both you and your little one adjust to school.

- ✓ Do your best to pick your child up on time. It is a long day for 3- and 4-year-olds. They are waiting for you. Just look at their faces when they see you at dismissal. Pure joy!
- ✓ Try to make after-school time a bit special, with a snack and time for the two of you to chat and cuddle.
- ✓ Your child might want to blurt out every little detail about school, or clam up completely. Either way, be patient and respect your child's response to their new experience.
- ✓ Your child will probably be famished after school. It's not unusual for little ones to just pick at their lunches.
- ✓ Your child might be grumpy and tired until they adjust. It would be wise to aim for earlier bedtimes. Early childhood can be exhausting!

Don't expect too much too soon. If your child is happy and seems to be enjoying school, that's a real achievement. The rest will come later.

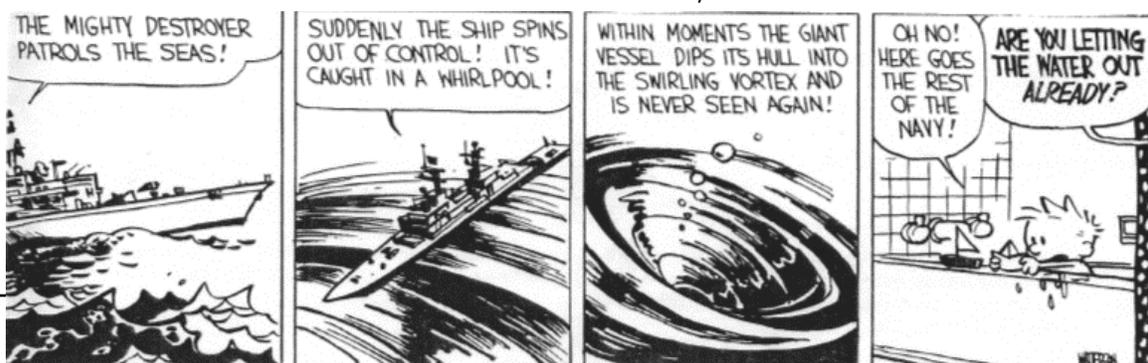
- ✓ If your child doesn't seem to be settling well, speak to the teacher. Early childhood is a partnership between teacher and caregivers. We need each other for success.

Settling in and doing well has a lot to do with you. If you show your child you think he can manage at school, he or she will start to believe it too. Try not to let your child know about any worries you might have. Sometimes it's helpful to talk to other parents about how they are doing this. Arranging a play date at the playground often helps.

It will help if your child understands the following:

- ✓ How the school routine operates. Ask your teacher what is expected this time of year. Common expectations would be sitting on the rug and listening to the teacher during morning meeting/story time and lying quickly on one's own mat during nap time.
- ✓ Cooperating, sharing, and playing fairly with other children (using words, not hands).
- ✓ Teachers are there to help and answer all their questions.

Adjustment is a process. We've been through a tough year and adjusting is bound to take time. The children are making great strides thanks to you!





School, Play, Independence

Children are walking into early childhood classrooms, many for the first time, after 18+ months of pandemic isolation. They have all had different experiences during the lockdown. Some of you were challenged by having to work from home AND keep your little ones occupied and safe. Is it surprising that many teachers are hearing children ask for iPads—their favorite pandemic toy? Or begging the teacher to “play with them”?

In the classroom children are discovering learning toys such as blocks, manipulatives such as magna tiles, and pretend play materials such as costumes. Each day they have over two hours to play with whatever they want, however they want. The amount of choices can be overwhelming and some children move from activity to activity at rapid speed having difficulty committing to any one thing. Others are discovering how much fun it is to have other children to play with!

We know the pandemic has contributed to children’s reliance on caregivers. Now it is the job of early childhood classrooms to teach independence. How else can two adults supervise and teach 15-18 young children? Even before the pandemic, it was known that children’s capacity for self-reliance has diminished. A study was done in the late 1940s and repeated in 2001. In 1940, kids ages 3, 5 and 7 were asked to stand perfectly still without moving. 3-year-olds couldn’t do it. 5-year-olds could do it for about three minutes. 7-year-olds could stand pretty much as long as they were asked. The 2001 results were very different. 5-year-olds acted at the level of 3-year-olds 60 years ago. 7-year-olds barely approached the level of a 5-year-old 60 years ago. Twenty years have passed since the last study. How much more self-reliance has been lost?

Make-believe unstructured play is a powerful tool for building self-discipline and independence. In play, children engage in what’s called private speech or self talk. They talk to themselves about what are going to do and how they are going to do it. “I’m going to feed the baby her carrots.” In other words, they are learning to plan next steps which is a high function brain skill. Additionally, by playing with others they are learning to resolve their conflicts because if they don’t, the play will end.

In the past some schools and parents have over emphasized drilling young children on their ABCs and 123s. Free play was devalued and often considered a waste of time. The pandemic has helped many to reprioritize educational values. Because children have been robbed of opportunities to socialize, it is easy to see how valuable social skills are to learning. Unstructured play supports social emotional learning because children are given age appropriate independence while under the watchful eye of a trained teacher.

So a silver lining to our 18-month ordeal might be a new found appreciation of creative open-ended play, whether is with or next to other children.

Adapted from *Alex Spiegel, February 21, 2008 NPR*

Back-to-School Anxiety During Covid

Kids are really used to being home with their parents. They go to school and are reminded to pull up their masks and wash their hands. Some children have become clingy. Separation anxiety comes and goes depending on the day.

It’s not easy to reassure your child when you aren’t so steady yourself. We’ve never done anything like this before and there isn’t a map. Here are a few pointers from the **Child Mind Institute** that might make separation more manageable for both of you.

- **Validate feelings:** It’s hard when kids are clingy or fearful about separating, but it’s important that the adult stay calm and as positive as possible. You want to acknowledge your child’s feelings without feeding them. Less is often more. “I will miss you too, and I’m so proud of you for going to school.”
- **Set the tone:** Lead the charge! Anxiety is contagious. If you’re anxious, your child will be too. Give simple honest answers to their questions. “I will pick you up when all the other parents come.”
- **Help them think positive:** It often helps if your child knows what you’re doing while they are at school. “Mommy’s going to be at work. I have your picture on my desk and will think about you when you are eating lunch.” A little something personal of yours can also be comforting. Perhaps a scarf or an half of a lost earring. For one child it was an expired MetroCard. By holding it he know Mommy was coming back.
- **Practice separating:** For children who are anxious about being apart, practice separation. A little separation builds tolerance and bravery. Encourage your child to play in another room while you make dinner in the kitchen. Having a trusted relative babysit while you run an errand might also help.
- **Have a routine:** Since young children can’t tell time they understand their day by knowing what comes next—hence the importance of regular routines. Try developing a goodbye routine with your child at drop off: a special, secret handshake, a kiss on both eyes and the nose, or a song and dance. Do it religiously and make it clear that once it occurs you are leaving. Dragging out a goodbye is kind of like ripping a Band-Aid off slowly.
- **Emphasize safety:** Assure your child that you know the teacher will take good care of them and keep them safe. Every teacher has a whole box of Paw Patrol Band-Aids!

If your child’s separation doesn’t improve after trying the above, partner with your child’s teacher and early childhood social worker. Both are experts when it comes to helping children adjust to separation.

Adapted from an article by *Caroline Miller*

