

G R E A T B E G I N N I N G S

A Series for Parents of Young Children



32 MONTHS

Help Your Child Get Off to a Good Start in a Child Care Program

Leaving your child in day care or preschool for the first time may be hard for both of you. Your child will face new adults, new children, new places, new things, new routines, and new limits. She is used to your comfort, help, and protection. She may be scared about being alone and angry with you for leaving her.

It's normal to be concerned. You may be worried that the teachers won't care for your child the way you would, or that they may ignore or hurt her. You may worry that she will embarrass you by crying or misbehaving. These feelings are normal responses to beginning something new. Some planning may reduce them.

Talk with your child about what will happen. You have taken the first step by carefully selecting child care that you think is right for your child. You have found child care workers that you like and can begin to trust. Now you should talk with your child about what is going to happen. She may not understand everything you say, but she certainly will pick up your feelings of confidence.

Make a *trial run* together. If possible, visit the program with your child before her first full day. Let her watch and explore with your help and protection.

Talk with the teacher. Talk with the teacher about your child before she begins the program. Tell the teacher about your child's eating and sleeping schedule, allergies, and other health concerns. You will want to talk about what upsets your child and how she can be comforted.

Take one favorite item the first day. On the day your child starts in the program, be sure you bring all the forms, clothes, equipment, and food that the teachers request. Bring one of your child's favorite things, such as a stuffed animal, a blanket, or a toy car.

Allow enough time to stay for a few minutes. Arrive a few minutes early so you can talk with the caregiver, put away your child's things, and sit with your child to watch what is going on. With a calm face and hugs and kisses, say "Goodbye" when it is time to leave. Tell her when you will return.

Walk away with courage. Of course your child may cry, or scream, or kick, or retreat to a corner with her thumb in her mouth. She may like this place, but she wants you with her and needs to say so. Even though it is very hard, keep walking. Remember that you trust the teacher and trust your child. It may help to call the teacher in an hour to learn how your child is doing.

Let her know how proud you are. When you pick up your child, greet her with warmth and words that show you know it was hard for her. Tell her that you

are proud that she made it through the day. Don't be surprised if she is both glad to see you and mad that you left her.

Saying *goodbye* gracefully takes time to learn. Learning how to say *goodbye* to people we love is difficult. Most of us struggle with this all our lives. This may be your child's first experience in saying "Goodbye" to you on a daily basis, and it will take time for you both to learn how to do this easily.

Separating from parents is a big job. Long after your child can say "Goodbye" without tears or anger, she may show signs of this stress when she is with you. Children often are angels at school (where they want to please these new adults) and are terrors at home (because you are safe and home is where she can blow off steam).

Expect some different behaviors for awhile. After starting child care, some children change their eating and sleeping patterns. Some children need more time curled up in their parents' laps or sucking their thumb. These behaviors will change as your child becomes more comfortable in the child care program.

Learning to adjust to change is a crucial skill. You can help most by trusting the caregiver's ability to teach, care for, and comfort your child. Trust your child's ability to learn these new and difficult skills. Trust yourself and the decisions you have made about the caregiver. Remember that you are helping your child learn how to adjust to changes that may be frightening. We all need to learn how to do this!

What's It Like to Be 2 ½ and 3 Years Old?

How I Grow

- I can walk upstairs alternating feet, but when I come downstairs alone I usually put both feet on each step.
- I can kick a ball pretty well.
- I like my clothes, especially my shoes.
- I like bedtime rituals; I don't like it when you change them.

How I Talk

- I like to have you talk to me about when I was a baby.
- I enjoy rhyming words and I'm interested in how words sound.
- I can tell you where things are, like where the birds live, where the table is, where my bed is.
- When I am 3 years old I will understand almost all the words I'll ever use in ordinary speech, but won't yet be able to say all these words.
- I may be able to tell people my last name as well as my first name.

What I Have Learned

- I can draw a cross on paper if you show me how.
- I'm learning about sequence, like "when daddy comes home we eat," "after I have a bath I go to bed."

How I Get Along with Others

- When I want something, I really want it, but sometimes I can't make up my mind about what I want.
- I act angry when you don't let me do what I want to do or when you interrupt my play.
- I'm beginning to learn about sex and the differences between boys and girls. I'm very curious about sex organs and like watching others in the bathroom or when they are undressing.
- Most of the time I don't like to share my toys with others.

What I Can Do for Myself

- Sometimes I want to do everything for myself and sometimes I want you to do everything for me.
- I can button my clothes.
- By the time I'm 3 years old, I'll probably be able to pick out and put on my own clothes.

Play I Enjoy

- I like to make mud pies.
- I like to make block houses and I like knocking them down.
- I like to march to music.

Children can be very different from each other. Don't worry if your child is "early" or "late" in growth. Look for your child's growth in each area. Encourage each new ability. If you are concerned about your child's development, talk with your doctor.

Games for Growing: Doesn't Belong

Purpose of the Game: To help your child learn about similarities and differences and to increase his observation skills.

How to Play: Draw four or five pictures or cut out four or five shapes that are all alike except one. Start with pictures or shapes obviously different, such as four pictures of trees and one picture of a house or four red triangles and one white circle. Later you can make the *different* pictures more like the others. For example, four dogs and a cat or four small red triangles and one large red triangle.

Ask your child to show you the one that is different from the others. Take turns.

You can also play this with actual objects found around the house and in the yard, such as four bottlecaps and a rock, four spoons and a fork, four red flowers and a white one.

Nutrition: Snacks with Appeal

Snacks like popsicles, cakes, cookies, and candy are very appealing to young children. They are all high in sugar and very sweet. But these snacks offer little in the way of good nutrition. They provide energy

but almost no vitamins, minerals, or protein.

However, there are many nutritious foods that are naturally tasty and will appeal to your child. Here are some suggestions:

- Fruit juice. Instead of fruit drinks offer fruit juice. Full strength fruit juice may be too strong tasting. When you use frozen fruit juice, add an extra can of water. If you buy bottled or canned fruit juice, add a cup of water to each quart of juice. This will give it a milder flavor, and it will stretch your food dollar.
- Fruit juice popsicles. Almost all children like fruit juice popsicles. Pour fruit juice into small paper cups and stick plastic spoons in as handles. Cover with aluminum foil to hold the spoon handles in place. Then place in your freezer.
- Yogurt popsicles. If you have a blender, you can make yogurt popsicles. Drain the liquid from a 16-ounce package of defrosted frozen fruit. Place the fruit into a saucepan. Add a tablespoon of unflavored gelatin. Heat slowly, stirring until the gelatin dissolves. Place this in a blender with 16 ounces of plain yogurt. Blend together. Pour into paper cups. Insert plastic spoons as handles. Cover with aluminum foil to keep handles in place. Put in the freezer until frozen.
- Snack-size pizza. For a snack-size pizza, take an English muffin and spread about 2 tablespoons of tomato sauce on top. Grate some cheese and sprinkle that over the top. Put your mini pizza under the oven broiler or in a toaster oven until the cheese melts.
- Quesadillas—a very popular and easy snack. Sprinkle cheese on half of a flour tortilla. Fold the other half over the cheese half. Heat in a frying pan at low heat until the cheese has melted.
- “Ants on a log”—an all-time favorite. Place peanut butter down the center of a celery stick. Put some raisin halves on top. It's ready to eat. (This snack is better for toddlers who have all their teeth and can chew well. They should brush right after—raisins can cause tooth decay.)

Try on Your Child's View of the World

Sometimes it's easier to understand and guide toddlers if we try to see the world as they see it. Most of us don't remember what it was like to be a toddler, so we have to use our imaginations.

Suppose Susie runs up to you happily to show you that she has learned to take the arms off her doll. Do you think first of the armless doll or do you see the world through Susie's eyes? Can you share her happiness, and show her how proud you are of her new found skill?

Jimmy has just learned he can hit two pans together and make a beautiful, loud noise. Is your first thought to stop the terrible noise or to show him your pleasure with his new discovery?

Susie and Jimmy love to learn. Encourage this learning now. Repairing the doll and quieting the banging can come later.

It's not always easy to set aside your own feelings to appreciate your toddler's achievements, but try it. You may find it makes life with your child richer and more pleasant for both of you.

Be Good to Yourself: Getting Control Over Your Life

Sometimes stress comes from a feeling that you have so many problems you can't even begin to solve them all. But if you handle one problem at a time, you may begin to feel you're in control of your life.

Here are some techniques for problem solving. You can work on them alone or with another person.

- Start by choosing one problem to work on. Pick a problem that you can identify exactly. Maybe it will be a problem that always happens at a certain time or with a certain person. An example might be that you can't look for a job because you don't have any child care.
- Gather all the information you can about your problem. Think about what seems to cause the

problem, what happens when the problem comes up, and how you would know if the problem was solved. Think about all the possible ways you could solve the problem. For example, you could ask someone to help with child care in exchange for a service you can offer them.

- Pick the solution that is most possible. Maybe you can afford to pay a babysitter for just a few hours if you know in advance when a job interview is scheduled.
- Decide exactly what you're going to do. Think about the steps you must take to make the solution work. Maybe you need to find a babysitter first, and then ask an employment counselor to help you arrange interviews in a certain time schedule. Write down the steps. Plan a time in the future when you can take another look at the problem and decide whether or not you've solved it.

Solving problems one at a time may seem slow, but each problem you solve makes your stress a little smaller. Each problem solved helps you feel more in charge of your life.

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