Preparing You Child for Montessori Preschool

This is an exciting time as you prepare for your child's first days and weeks of school. It is a time of transition for children and for parents, and we have found that the experience will be richer and more positive with the right kind of preparation. Following are the *emotional* and *physical* preparations we have found to be most helpful during the transition to preschool.

Provide social experiences away from home and away from you: it is important for every child to learn to separate from parents and learn to feel safe and comfortable in the presence of other trusted adults. This is a critically important preparation for school because these experiences allow the child to discover that they can stay in other environments *and* enjoy themselves, relaxing and trusting that their parent will return for them later.

- Arrange play dates or short classes during the summer, where you leave your child in the care of another trusted adult for increasing longer periods of time.

- Always explain to your child that you will be gone for a while, and that you will return a bit later.

- Be consistent in returning in a timely way, when the class or activity has ended, so your child experiences that you always return as you said you would.

Include the new school and new adults in regular conversation at home: By hearing you speak of the new school casually, your child will sense that you already know a lot about this place and you are comfortable and excited.

- When speaking with your child about the new school, refer to specific teachers and other adults by name so your child will begin to regard these people as familiar and trusted adults even before school has begun.

Discuss what will happen when school starts: It is comforting to children to

hear what will happen, and likewise unsettling for children when changes occur for which they are not prepared. As you talk with your child about their new school, remember to be positive, brief, and consistent in what you say so they can begin to relax into the new routine before school has even begun.

• Keep your descriptions brief, truthful, and clear as you describe what will happen on a school day, for example: "*After breakfast we'll drive to your new school and greet your teacher at the door. She'll probably shake your hand and invite you in. You'll go inside and work and play with friends in the classroom, while I do some of my own work at home/office/etc. You'll have a snack, play on the playground, and have lunch at school. After you finish working and playing at school, I'll come back to pick you up and then we'll go home together.*"

• Tell a true-life story to help your child become comfortable with the new school routine well before the first day.

Tips for relying on routines and rules – CDC article linked

• Lengthy farewells create separation anxiety for both child and adult and add confusion and stress to the child's experience of school. Keep your morning ritual short, simple and consistent.

• Convey your confidence in the new school as you approach the building, such as: "*I see your new teacher and some new friends have already arrived. It's going to be a great day at school*."

• At the door, keep your goodbyes brief and positive, such as: "*Have a great day! I love you and I will be back when your school day is done.*"

• If your child is having a difficult morning separation, you are encouraged to call the school office or email to ask about how your child is doing. We are always happy to give you an update. In most cases, within moments of the parent's departure, the child will have settled into an activity in the classroom. Equally important as the emotional preparations mentioned above is the physical support that provides your child with the confidence and stamina to get the most out of school.

Assure Adequate Sleep: A well-rested child is better able to manage every aspect of life. According to Michael Brews, PhD, children between

3-6 years of age require 10 ¾ – 12 hours of sleep per day. When a child is well rested, she will awake on her own.

• A healthy schedule for children this age would be bedtime between 7:00 – 8:00pm and rising between 6:00 – 7:00am. This routine also allows adequate time in the morning so that there is no need to rush.

• Establishing and maintaining a consistent, calm bedtime ritual is the best way to assure your child receives adequate sleep. The following may help:

1. Turn off all screens (including television and video games) at least 3 hours prior to bedtime. A "no TV policy during the week can make this much easier.
2. A warm bath may help the child relax and prepare for sleep.
3. Dim the lights in the child's bedroom to set the mood for relaxation and sleep.
4. Read a short story or share a quiet conversation before bed.
5. Offering a short, relaxing massage of the child's back or feet may help them relax.

Eat a Healthy Breakfast: Children who are hungry do not function as well and tend to be more anxious.

• Allow adequate time in the morning routine that your child can enjoy breakfast sitting down at the table, and avoid eating on the run, in front of a television, or in the car.

• Choose breakfast foods that provide sustained energy and that are low in sugar and high in protein and complex carbohydrates

Allow your child to be as independent as possible with self-care routines. At school we have prepared environments that support the young child's acquisition of independent life skills. Children who have been given many opportunities to be independent at home, especially with self-care, make an easier transition to school. Please support your child in becoming independent in the following areas:

Bathroom: Children that are newly potty trained often have accidents that occur at school. The child is guided to be as independent as possible in changing into a dry set of clothes. We encourage you to

support his same level of independence at home.

Dressing: Consider, first and foremost, your child's ability to manage getting into and out of the clothing they wear to school.

- Elastic waistbands are easiest to manage, especially in the bathroom at school.
- Avoid buttons, zippers and belts until your child has developed the skills to manage them independently.
- Limit the available choices by only making available (to the child) clothing that is appropriate for school. In other words, keep seasonally inappropriate or "dress up" (costume) clothing in a separate place from everyday/school clothing.
- Invite your child to select clothing (for the next day) the night before to simplify the morning routine.

Managing one's own possessions: Most children have a few possessions they will bring into the classroom –a jacket, the shoes they wore and perhaps a hat.

- Rather than acting as valet, we encourage you to offer your child a sense of responsibility for their belongings by sharing the task, such as: "I will help you carry your things into the building from the car; what would you like to carry?"

- Personal items such as toys, jewelry and watches tend to distract from activities at school and, therefore, are best left at home or in the car.

- It is encouraged for long hair to be pulled back out of the child's face with a simple elastic hair band. Headbands and barrettes tend to slip out and are not useful.