

PREPARING FOR THE FIRST DAY OF CHILDCARE

The first day of childcare is a very special occasion for parent and child. Parents, you are entrusting your children to others, that perhaps you have just recently met. Your children will be in a new and exciting environment where they will make friends with other children their age, where they will be cared for by loving and nurturing teachers. And even though you have carefully chosen St. James ELC, and you feel secure that it's a good fit for your family, as the big day approaches, you might be wondering: What if he doesn't want me to leave? What if the teachers can't understand what she wants? What if he cries?

Here are a few tips that will help you and your child have a positive and successful first day of school. Of course, how you do so will depend upon the child's age, temperament, and level of maturity.

General Preparation Tips before the First Day of Child Care

- Trust your judgment that you have selected a childcare setting where your child will be happy and receive nurturing care and love.
- Begin to develop a relationship with the teachers/caregivers. Keep the lines of communication open. Ask questions and share anxieties you might have about your child starting childcare for the first time. The teachers are professionals and are trained to support parents and children through the adjustment period.
- Understand that children react to new situations in different ways. Discuss your child's temperament and possible reactions to the new surroundings with the teachers.
- To help develop a separation routine, ask the teachers about what you should do at arrival. Try not to prolong your departure when dropping off, as this may create more stress, leaving a child feeling nervous and fearful anticipating your departure.
- Pack everything you need the night before, and place it in a special spot. Label everything that your child will take on the first day: clothes, bottles, bottle tops, food, backpack, diapers, binkies, and cuddly toys for nap (Note: Some schools do not allow blankets or cuddly toys for infants so be sure to check ahead).
- Make sure to schedule ample time on your work calendar, so you don't feel rushed, have time to help your child get settled in, and be able to take a few minutes for yourself afterwards.

How to Prepare Your Children before the First Day of Child Care

- Remind your child about the upcoming event. Talk about friends who already have children in childcare or in school. Remind children that they will have fun at school and meet new friends.
- Preparation for the first day of daycare or school will vary based on your child's age. All children will notice that something new is happening, but will react to the change in different ways. Babies may be a little fussier than usual. Older children may be a little clingier.
- Keep your emotions in check. Often, it can be tough, but make sure that your emotions and actions are positive in front of your child. Children can become confused if you are tearful, as you describe how happy they're going to be, in this *wonderful, fun place!*
- Involve your child in preparing for the first day of childcare. Have him help select what he wants to wear, pack the backpack, and select a lovey for naptime. Teachers like you to bring a family photo, including their beloved pets, to put up in the classroom!
- For toddlers and above, explain what will happen during the morning of their first day: "We'll get up and get dressed, have a good breakfast, and then drive together to childcare. I'll stay

- for a little while, and we will read a story. Then I will give you a big hug and kiss and go to work, just like all the other parents. We'll give your teacher your yellow blanket and teddy bear to put in your cubby for naptime."
- Keep the home environment as consistent as possible. This is not the time to make any major changes, if at all possible.

Tips for the Morning of the First Day of Child Care

- Wake up early enough to get ready for school without rushing. Enjoy a leisurely breakfast and remind your child about the plan for the day.
- Allow time for the transition from home to childcare. Upon arriving at the center, spend a few minutes introducing your child to the teacher. Spend time with your child and caregiver. Talk to the teacher about your child's evening and morning, and then be sure to give all necessary instructions both verbally and in writing.
- Help your toddler or preschooler child find an activity he/she likes and join in for a few minutes before leaving the center. When it's time to leave, create a goodbye routine. Give your child a cheerful and confident goodbye. Reassure your child that you'll be back at the end of the day and when, by giving an example, such as after you wake up from your nap, or after you come inside from the playground. Never sneak out during the childcare drop-off. Always tell your child you are leaving. Although it might be tempting, sneaking away when your child is engaged in an activity will likely cause him to have a harder time trusting when you will leave and when you will return. Let the teachers know when you are ready to leave. Teachers want to nurture children through the transition and need to know when to help your child say goodbye. Say goodbye to the teachers. Leave quickly; don't linger at the door.
- After you leave, reflect upon the morning. It's normal to feel a bit anxious or concerned during child care drop-offs. Call the ELC any time for updates and reassurance. Understand that it's normal for many children to shed tears, scream, or beg you not to go. If this happens, think about the happy children you saw during the pre-visits or ask for a call later. Be careful not to judge the class by drop-off time. This is one of the most hectic times of the day and isn't usually typical of the rest of the day. Remind yourself that your child is in a wonderful childcare setting, playing, learning, enjoying new experiences, and developing relationships with teachers who will do everything possible to help him feel secure and happy!