



## *Pint-Size Pupils: Tips to ease into preschool*

By Mary Curran-Downy



Kids aren't the only ones starting school this fall. For every 3-year-old clutching a "Pocahontas" lunch box, there is at least one parent sweating a little under the business suit or blue jeans, wondering if this is a good thing. Even parents who have been the route before – the ones who can find the water fountain and the bathrooms, who know where to sign in and how to fill a cubby – can feel a little queasy when meeting a new preschool teacher. How do you let the teacher know that your little one is a teensy bit nervous around 30 strangers? Will she or he figure out that your darling won't eat the crusts on sandwiches? Do they realize the child is surgically attached to that filthy rag she calls a blankie?

With this in mind, we offer tips from a 20-year veteran of the preschool classroom, Jan Morante. Morante has seen it all and heard it all, and still enjoys what she does. She recently polled her fellow teachers to help put together the following list of **10 Preschool Pointers**:

***Say goodbye to your child and leave.***

Prolonging the morning separation scene can be agony. A kiss and a hug and off you go with a smile. If your child does the glue number and sticks to your legs, ask the teacher to gently pry your little one off you. "The child recovers in two or three minutes," says Morante. "The

parent is usually a mess for hours, so if you are still concerned when you get home or to work, give your teacher a call. Too many parents turn this into a big ordeal, and it doesn't have to be."

***Leave the fancy outfits and patent-leather shoes at home.***

Put girls and boys in shorts or jeans and save the good stuff for church and parties. "We've had parents ask us not to let their children get dirty because they're going out somewhere later in the day," said Morante. "That's ridiculous. Bring a change of clothes and let your kid be a kid."

***Take tales of preschool with a grain of salt.***

"Try not to believe everything your child says about us, and we promise we won't believe everything they say about you!" Morante says. And this will really please you, she says. Kids come into school full of information on Mommy and Daddy's fight last night and how Daddy slept on the couch and the names they called each other and on and on and on. She also knows kids go home with stories about school that may not be accurate. Also, parents should communicate with the teacher more than the "hi" and "bye" routine at the start and end of every day if they want to know what really goes on.

***Don't sneak out the door.***

This may sound confusing, but it really doesn't contradict the first rule. "This can really devastate a child," she said. "Sometimes, parents don't want a scene, so they run out the door when their child isn't looking, and it takes the child all morning to recover. Tell your child you are leaving, and remind them what time you will pick them up."

***Allow a few extra minutes to give your child a good breakfast.***

Many preschools will allow children to bring in breakfast, but they don't want your child to start the day with soda and Twinkies.

***If your child is sick, keep him at home.***

"It's not fair to us – or to them," said Morante. "Some parents will dose their children with Tylenol in the parking lot and shove them in the door. When the medicine wears off and we see the child is sick, we're going to call."

***Getting used to preschool takes time.***

"The more consistent the time in school, the easier it will be for your child to adjust," according to Morante. That doesn't mean that parents have to leave their children in preschool for five full days to get them used to the routine. But she believes a five-day, half-time schedule is easier on a child than a two-day-a-week, full time day, because the child will learn the

routines quicker and makes friends faster.

***Get involved.***

Volunteer to go on a field trip. (Author's note: Volunteer for a day at the beach, not lunch at Chuck E. Cheese. Trust me.) If you can't leave work, send along something for the trip, like snacks or a drink.

If you can't find the time to work in the classroom ask the teacher if there are projects you can do at home, like cutting out pumpkins or leaves.

***Let your child be a child; engineering can come later.***

"I've had parents ask why their children aren't bringing home work sheets," said Morante. "I tell them their children are learning to be independent, to think for themselves, to take responsibility and to learn some social skills. Those are the basics of preschool."

***Remember, you know your child best.***

If you find a particular teacher isn't good for your child, follow through. Morante suggests you talk to the teacher and to the supervisor, and if need be, change teachers.

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