

Helping Children Settle

Every child reacts differently to new situations. You can help your child settle into preschool by,

- Planning with your child how you will say goodbye.
- Establishing a routine for leaving your child, such as arrive at preschool, encourage your child to put his/her bag away, greet the teacher marking the roll, do a puzzle or read a story, then say goodbye and leave.
- Using the same routine daily allows your child to know when you will be leaving, making the separation easier to accept.
- If problems emerge talk to the preschool staff. If a child has difficulty separating from their parent or carer the following strategies will be employed to ensure positive, caring and respectful relationships are developed and maintained
- A staff member will be available as the parent/carers prepares to say goodbye
- Staff will calmly talk to the child, offer comfort, a quiet place to go to together, offer a special story, toy or activity, or other diversion or distraction tactic to help the child calm
- The staff member will remain with the child until they calm down, stop crying and are ready to join other activities, many children settle after a few minutes
- Staff will ask the child if it is OK to hold their hand, sit on the adults lap or have a hug to help them settle
- We will only physically restrain or lift and carry a child once other strategies have been tried or if the child's or other children's safety is at risk
- Parents are welcome to ring the Preschool during the session to find out how their child settled

Earlier is Not Better

Many parents are concerned when their children aren't learning to recognise letters and numbers. They feel that stencils, worksheets and homework in preschool programs will prepare their children for school.

Preschools could give your children workbooks. We could make them memorise the alphabet. We could drill them. We could test them. But we know that if we do, your children are going to lose something very important.

Children who are rushed into reading and writing too soon miss important steps in learning and may suffer later on because they lack the foundation they need to use language. Children who are taught to read in preschool may be able to sound out and recognise words, but they may have very little understanding of what they are actually reading. If they haven't been given time to play, they won't have explored objects enough to know what words (like soft, softer, softest) mean. If they are not allowed to thread beads, dress up, cut, paste, pour and draw, they won't develop the fine muscle skills they need for writing. One of our aims in preschool is to provide children with as many experiences as possible to hear and use oral language and to help them develop listening and sound discrimination skills.

Because maths involves much more than memorising facts (like $2+2=4$) and because it involves logical thinking, children shouldn't be pushed into paper and pencil arithmetic too soon. To acquire the foundations for logical thinking, children need many opportunities to count objects, sort them into piles, add some to a pile and take some away, and make patterns and sequences. It is by playing games like them what they will truly understand addition, subtraction, division and multiplication. Without these concrete experiences, children may give correct answers but probably won't understand what they are doing and why.

Worst of all, if children are rushed into academic subjects too soon, they may lose their enthusiasm for learning and their sense of themselves as learners. If children are told what to learn and memorise by the teacher, they may become passive and dependant learners and will be less excited about learning new things. Children who are given plenty of time and a range of opportunities to play however, learn to ask questions and work out their own answers. They are responsible for their own learning. They see themselves as creators, explorers, discoverers, problem-solvers and inventors.

In time, they learn to use one object to represent another. This is the beginning of symbolic thinking. They might pretend a stick is an aeroplane or a block is a car. Gradually children become more and more able to use abstract symbols like words to describe their thoughts and feelings. They learn to 'read' pictures which are symbols of real peoples, places and things. This significant and exciting development takes place during the preschool years as children play.

Play provides the foundations for academic 'school' learning. It is the preparation children need to effectively learn highly abstract symbols such as letters (which are symbols for sound) and numbers (which are symbols for number concepts). Our role at preschool is to carefully plan our learning environment and a wide range of experiences for children that will enable them to experiences, experiment, discover, practice and master a wide variety of skills that will cement a strong foundation for their future learning and life. In addition, we have a focus on providing opportunities for children to learn and practice the social skills that they will need to develop and sustain friendships and relationships throughout their lives.

Play enables us to achieve the goals of our early childhood curriculum. Play is the work of young children.

Common Questions

1. **What if they won't let me go?** Decide if you are happy to leave your child. They may get upset. Staff are very experienced in these situations. If you have decided to leave, say to your child-“let's do one thing together, and then I'm going”. Make sure a staff person is aware of your issue then follow through –leave. Children are seldom upset for more than a few moments. You can call later to see how they're going.
2. **What if I can't leave my child upset?** Then stay. But make sure staff are aware of your situation. We will then make a transition plan together.
3. **What if they tell me that they don't have any friends?** For some children this is developmental in that they are still in a 'solitary', or 'parallel' play stage. This is not uncommon. For others we can work on specific skills, and strategies. It may be as simple as highlighting for the child when they are having fun with a child or a group... “it looks like you're having a great time with all your friends...lets write down their names so we can tell mum/dad”
4. **They don't seem to be eating/drinking much?** Let us know and we'll be more explicit with your child's snack/water intake. Remember it's about encouraging independence, and self-management.
5. **Why can't they tell me about their day?** Break it down into small components. Did you have a swing? Who was next to you on the swing? What songs did you sing? Who did you sit next to at lunch?
6. **Why don't they draw?** We do encourage participation in a range of experiences, but for some drawing is not an interest. This could be developmental- in which case we encourage fine motor foundational experiences e.g play dough, finger painting etc. Some children have sound fine motor skills e.g work really well with Lego, but seldom draw. In this case we monitor their development with drawing tools, and if necessary be more directive with our expectations.