



GOOD BEGINNINGS



We are so happy and excited that your child is joining us here at Saint Mark's Preschool and we are here to help make the transition to school as comfortable as possible for you and your child. Starting preschool is a major life transition for both young children and their families. Change, even when it is a positive change, can be stressful. In many cases this may be the first time a child is away from their family or an individual caregiver. Both the child and parents may experience separation anxiety. Parents want to know that their child will be in a loving and safe environment when the child is not in their direct care. Young children have been developing an attachment to their parents and are often secure in their daily home life and routine. There are specific measures that both parents and caregivers can take to ease the transition to care and alleviate separation anxiety:

- » Recognize your child's temperament. All children have unique personalities and as many different reactions to starting school. Some children will be very active on their first day and want to touch and try everything; others will be more cautious and quietly observe what is going on before feeling comfortable about joining in. Some children will cry or show frustration. These are all normal and typical behaviors. Some children will be happy for the first few days and then later show signs of separation anxiety.
- » Recognize your own feelings. Your child is sensitive to your emotional state. Stay positive and show your child that you are comfortable and excited that he is starting school.
- » Prepare your child in advance. Talk with your child about starting school. Read books to her about preschool and how much fun she will have, as well as talking about what will happen when you say goodbye and when you will return. Establish a "goodbye" ritual.
- » Parents are very welcome to come and visit the school with their child a day or two before the enrollment date. We suggest that this visit is kept to 30 minutes and should be during the week before the first enrollment date.
- » Set up a planned routine for the first day. It is usually easier for most children to be dropped off during outside time so a good time to arrive would be about 8:45am. Go into the classroom with your child to sign them in and put their lunch and spare clothes in the cubbies. Then go onto the yard, and find your child's teachers. You may choose to keep the first day short. Children who have little experience in group settings may have absorbed all they can in a couple of hours.
- » Give the child a transitional object for the first few days – a blanket or stuffed toy. However, please keep in mind that this object may get lost or damaged at school, so always have a back up at home. Many young children will hold on to their lunch box or backpack for the first few days as a connection to home.
- » Communicate with the teachers. The teachers are here to help make the transition as smooth as possible for your child. Don't be afraid to ask for assistance. Make sure you communicate with teachers about anything they will need to know about your child to make the day run smoothly – eg your child didn't eat much breakfast and may need an early snack or that you will be back before lunch to pick them up.
- » Say goodbye to your child. You may wish to warn your child that you will be leaving in five minutes or after you have finished the particular activity (reading a story or digging in the sand). When it is time to go, say good-bye and go. Continued extensions to the separation seem to only add to anxiety and make the separation more difficult. Always resist the temptation to "sneak" out. Regardless of how upset the child is, sneaking out only adds to their anxiety, and breaks down the child's sense of trust.
- » Feel free to telephone the school office for updates throughout the day.
- » Please ask if you have any questions.

It is the role of parents and teachers to support children through this process. Preschool is a very fun place for children. They make friends; they bond with teachers and other adults, and relish having their own special place. Keeping this in mind, and a positive attitude from parents goes a long way to enabling children to cope with separation in a healthy and productive way.