

Parents' Tips on Getting Your Child Who Is Blind or Visually Impaired Ready for Preschool¹

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Transition to preschool for children who are blind or visually impaired is a big deal. Your little person is transitioning from the routine that we parents set up to the whole new world of **school**. This is a big deal. I've worked with a number of parents over many years who have made discoveries about how to navigate the transition experience. Here are some of their thoughts:

- Everyone wants what is best for your child. Their ideas may be different than yours and that might seem like you're not on the same team...but you are. That's an important point: no matter what you have heard from others, **the school team wants what's best for your child and needs you to be a key member of your child's team**. Remember that this team will be with you and your child for over a decade. Build, don't alienate.

¹ <https://familyconnect.org/browse-by-age/infants-and-toddlers/transition-to-independence-iandt/getting-your-child-ready-for-preschool/>



- You have [legal rights](#) that spell out much of your role and responsibility in navigating the school experience with your child. You are given a copy of these rights during some of the meetings leading up to your child's first day of school.
- During those meetings remember to focus on your child, her abilities and needs. Think about these ahead of time and be ready to "report" about your child.
- Have another adult with you at the meetings.
- Listen and take notes.
- Ask questions when you don't understand.
- Actively participate in the meeting.
- Know the next steps and confirm who is responsible for making it happen.
- Keep one active calendar with phone numbers.

Preparing Your Visually Impaired Child for the Bus, Classroom, Cafeteria, and Playground

- If your child is using the bus, start using it ASAP. Before your child's first day of school, see if you can have your child be on a bus when no one else is there and maybe go for a little ride.
- Meet the bus driver. Take a picture (good quality) and put it in an album to talk about (for children who don't use pictures, you could use your phone to record the bus driver's voice).
- Talk about school—roleplay if that's appropriate for your child.
- Meet the teacher and take a photo or record her voice.
- Meet the classroom/personal assistant ahead of time if using one. If possible, have him/her spend time with your child at home to get acquainted.
- Check out the classroom when no one else is in the room but you and the teacher.
- Explore the toys and areas and bathroom.
- Visit the cafeteria when it's empty, if using one.



- Check out the playground when no one else is around. Ask your O&M specialist to join you and help introduce your child to each piece of equipment and find routes around the playground, if appropriate.

Comfort Items

- See if you could bring home one item that will signify “school” for your object calendar.
- Go shopping for a new backpack, snazzy shoes, and socks that your child picks out (even if that means choosing between two).
- Send something of yours in the backpack that you and your child put in there together (check with teacher first to be sure it’s ok).

Put Together a Personalized Guidebook for Your Child’s Teachers

- A small “Jane’s Guidebook” might be a tool to help teachers and specialists learn how to help “Jane” visually. For example, wall pictures, names, etc. need to be down low for your child to see, sitting near a story reader is helpful (but not all the time because “Jane” will become the object of envy).
- Having a “display” book of the day’s story for a closer view is great.
- Using darker markers and pencils makes marks easier to see.
- Glare is not your child’s friend because it makes items and people harder to see. Also, she needs to be out of her chair often to get a change of pace and to see things from a different perspective.
- Describe bathroom signs or cues, identify other signs and cues.
- Mention when to wear glasses. Mention when to switch to sunglasses. And discuss any glasses “rules” like only the teacher takes off glasses.
- Discuss cane etiquette. Mention the cane’s name. Remember that no one touches the cane without asking, identify the place to “park” the cane, and identify when your child’s cane is used.
- Keep the “guide” light in tone, use pictures when you can, and make it durable. Several copies might be helpful.
- Your guidebook might have some Sighted Guide quick pointers and any information about special equipment briefly noted. Keep it clear and short.



Managing the Emotional Adjustment

- Find out how you can be involved in the class...snacks for parties, calling list parent, making fliers, bulletin board helper, etc. (Again, check with the teacher about the rules).
- Make an object calendar with items your child has helped collect that signify school days and other important work events.
- Decorate walkers and chairs appropriately, but personally, to encourage other children to have an easy chat opener.
- **This is important!** Plan something to do the first day your child goes to school. Meet a friend, go to work, go to a movie, read a good book, write a blog, or find a good exercise class. Do something. Why? Your job is shifting big time. You are moving from the CEO to the advisory board. But never for one second forget that this is your child, and you are the ultimate boss every single second. All decisions are yours to agree to or to make. You are on a team. And you are not in a popularity contest. These are your teammates, not your best friends. With respect and good listening skills, this team can become the dream team for your child's transition to school.

The following thought comes from a wise young dad:

“The most difficult aspect for me of transitioning my two-year-old to school was handling the nerves and fear I felt in sending her off ‘on her own.’ Up to that point, she had spent most of her time in our controlled home environment and, usually, with either her mom or me there for her. Sending her to school with strange children and adults she didn’t know was scary. There is an inherent dad tendency to want to protect and a resulting fear associated with not being able to protect her as she transitioned to school. I think the best thing I could have done would have been to trust in my daughter’s strength, spirit, and personality. She is such a strong and independent person. Had I trusted in her unique personality, I would have realized I didn’t need to worry so much because there hasn’t been anything so far that she can’t seem to handle.”

You may find this article on [“Pre-Preschool Anxiety for Parents of Toddlers Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired”](#) useful as well as the [Parents of Blind Infants and Toddlers Forum](#) on the FamilyConnect message boards.

P.S. Congratulations! This is a big and very exciting step, and you’ve made it happen!

