

Pre-Preschool Anxiety for Parents of Toddlers Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired¹

If you're thinking, "I just can't put her on a bus and send her away for half the day," you're not alone. The very thought of being separated from their three-year-old makes many parents uncomfortable. Add to that the anxiety of knowing their child will be in an unfamiliar environment, and it's not hard to understand their feelings. When a child is visually impaired, those feelings can be heightened by worries about how she'll get along on her own with strangers and whether those people will understand her and respond to her needs.

Preparing Your Visually Impaired Child for Preschool

However scary it seems, there are ways to ease the transition into preschool and prepare both you and your child for the experience.

A couple of weeks before your child starts school, ask if the two of you can visit together for short periods of time over several days. This will give your child a chance to become familiar with the building, the classroom, and some of the people she'll get to know. Be aware, however, that not every school will let you visit in advance.

If you're buying your child new clothes, or a lunchbox, or a backpack for school, let her have a choice in selecting them. If she has a special outfit for the first day, she might want to wear it at home once or twice to get comfortable in it. She could also practice wearing her backpack or carrying her lunchbox. The two of you could even have a morning of "pretend school" involving a few typical activities to help familiarize her with some of the things she'll be doing at school.

If the school hasn't suggested using a communication notebook, ask if you can use one. This is a notebook that goes back and forth between home and school. You can write notes to the teacher in it, and the teacher can write notes to you. Also, ask if there's a way to contact the teacher and when it would be most convenient to do so. In addition, let the teacher know how you can be reached and when it's easiest for you to talk.

Ask about accompanying your child to school on the first day and whether you can stay for the start of the school day. Some programs may believe that it's distracting for your child and others to have you in the room but will let you watch from the door. Other programs may prefer you not

¹ <https://familyconnect.org/browse-by-age/infants-and-toddlers/transition-to-independence-iandt/pre-preschool-anxiety/>



come to school in the beginning because it might interfere with your child's being able to develop relationships with the teacher and classmates she'll be meeting.

Give your child something from home that's familiar—a small toy, her favorite jacket, or perhaps a blanket for rest time—that will give her a sense of security. In a week or so, when she's more comfortable in her new environment, she probably won't need or even want that symbolic item any longer.

