**Starting preschool – tips**

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We understand that your child's first days at preschool can be a daunting prospect for both you and them. Here is our advice that we hope will help to ensure that their experience of our preschool is a happy one from the start.

Social confidence

Socialising with other children is a skill that is learnt gradually, and some children will find it easier than others. Preschool is a great place to experience this. If you can also introduce them to the idea of sharing and taking turns before they start at preschool they'll find the whole experience less daunting. Don't expect great things at first – it is quite normal for children play alongside, rather than together to start off with. Simple family games like rolling or kicking a ball to each other introduces the concept of turn-taking. Sharing out snacks or fruit amongst family or friends models the idea of sharing and demonstrating how to share e.g. “I’ve got some bubbles, I can share with you, it’s your turn now……..it’s my turn now, thankyou for sharing with me”. Squabbles over toys are quite normal and an important part of their development.

Time away from parents

It will be easier for your child to settle at preschool if you've gradually got them used to being left with other carers, e.g. relatives or friends. Start off by leaving them for short periods - an hour while you go shopping, for example - and then gradually build it up until your child is happy to be left for a whole morning or an afternoon without you. Although their key person at preschool will be less familiar to them, the experiences of being left with familiar people before starting will help them and they will soon get to know their key person.

Preschool may not be open – but you can still ‘visit’

Take walks to preschool, or drive past on your way to somewhere else. You can look at the preschool garden and talk to them about what they are going to play on. If you have visited preschool with them already, you might talk about what they played with indoors too. Having a familiar journey to preschool will relax your child on the first day, as this bit won’t be new.

Borrow some books to help

Visit your local library and borrow some books on starting preschool such as My Preschool by Anne Rockwell or Maisy Goes To Preschool by Lucy Cousins. When you've read them, talk to your child about all the fun activities they might be doing at preschool, such as playing outside on bikes, painting pictures, playing with sand and water, making models, singing rhymes, baking cakes and building with bricks and lego.

On the first day

* You may be feeling just as anxious and emotional as they are (or possibly more!) but try to stay cheery and confident - children pick up on your feelings of apprehension.
* Explain to your child when you'll be back - don't fob them off with fibs such as "Mummy's just going to move the car" when you make your exit. Tell them you'll be back after play time/story time. You could tell them what you might be doing so they can visualise this rather than wonder where you are e.g. “I’m going to go to the shop and get your favourite sausages for your dinner”.
* When you've said your goodbyes, try not to worry. If there is a problem, you'll be contacted, but in most cases your child will be enjoying their exciting new experience.

Settling in is different for everyone

Some children find the experience of starting preschool stressful and may struggle to settle initially. It can feel like your child is the only one upset, but even the most confident of children sometimes have a little ‘wobble’. Try not to worry and don't blame yourself - just accept that children are all individuals and your child will get there in the end.

* We can reassure you with what happens once you've left. Whether they continue crying, have unsure moments, or whether they perk up 2 minutes later once they're distracted by an activity.
* If they or you are finding it very difficult, we can arrange to build up sessions gradually. Start with a shorter session and build up the time gradually each week until they're able to stay more confidently without you.
* Often children will settle better if you keep your goodbyes brief - lingering may only make the whole process more painful for your both.
* Do call in to check up on your child if this makes you feel better – as many times as you like!

Don't fret about letters and numbers

We all want our children to do well, but don’t worry or expect your child to be a genius before they have even started preschool! Don’t expect them to reel off colours, numbers or the alphabet. Learning for young children is all about play, the best learning will happen when they are encouraged to play and lead their own learning. This doesn't mean your child will have free, undirected play throughout the session - as we will provide a balanced curriculum that will help them to learn through their play including some appropriate, directed activities that are suitable for your child's level of development.

If you want to encourage learning at home it helps to make it fun: play games of I-Listen (a pre ‘I spy’ game when they listen and identify the sound – is it a bird?, a car driving past?, a clock ticking……); encourage number recognition by counting everyday objects like red cars in the street; bake cakes to find out about weighing and measuring; give them dressing up clothes to encourage role-play games; let them finger paint; or make home-made playdough together – squishing playdough builds the small muscles in the hands, developing fine motor control for when they begin to write later.

Play dough is simple to make – try this recipe:

**No-cook playdough**

**Makes**1 coloured ball **Prep** 10 minutes

**You will need**

* 8 tbsp plain flour
* 2 tbsp table salt
* 60ml warm water
* food colouring
* 1 tbsp vegetable oil

**Method**

1. Mix the flour and salt in a large bowl. In a separate bowl mix together the water, a few drops of food colouring and the oil.

2. Pour the coloured water into the flour mix and bring together with a spoon.

3. Dust a work surface with a little flour and turn out the dough. Knead together for a few minutes to form a smooth, pliable dough. If you want a more intense colour you can work in a few extra drops of food colouring.

4. Store in a plastic sandwich bag (squeeze out the air) in the fridge to keep it fresh.

Squidge, mould, share out and enjoy!!

**Further information is in your Welcome Pack.**