



## 16 Strategies for a Successful First Day of Preschool

Starting preschool or elementary school is an exciting milestone, but it can also be an emotional one—for both you and your child. You may be eager for your child to take this next step, but worried about how they will handle the separation. Will they cry or cling to your leg? Will you find yourself holding back tears as well?

Rest assured, it's completely normal for young children to feel apprehensive about new experiences, and many preschools are prepared to help ease the transition. Even if your child starts off confidently, they may become upset if they see other children crying. Separation anxiety typically lessens after a few weeks.

While there's no guaranteed way to make the first day completely stress-free, there are many steps you can take to prepare your child—and yourself—for a smoother transition. Here are 16 strategies to help your child start school with confidence:

### Before the First Day

1. **Meet the Teacher** – If possible, arrange a meeting with your child's teacher before school starts. Some preschools offer home visits, but if not, find out when you can introduce your child to their new teacher.
2. **Visit the Classroom** – Take your child to visit the classroom ahead of time to familiarize them with the environment. Afterwards, talk about what you saw to build excitement and comfort.
3. **Bring a Comfort Item** – Ask the teacher if your child can bring a special object (like a blanket or small toy) for reassurance. Be sure to check the school's policies on personal items.
4. **Send a Family Picture** – If allowed, provide a small family photo for your child to keep in their cubby or on a special wall in the classroom.
5. **Make a Friend Beforehand** – Get the names of some classmates and arrange a playdate before school starts. Having a familiar face on the first day can make a big difference.
6. **Explore the Playground** – If possible, visit the school's playground ahead of time so your child can get used to the equipment and surroundings.
7. **Practice Saying Goodbye** – Role-play the first day at home. Act out waking up, eating breakfast, getting ready, arriving at school, and saying goodbye.

### Preparing for Drop-Off

8. **Create a Goodbye Ritual** – Establish a simple, consistent routine for saying goodbye, such as a hug, a high-five, or a special phrase.
9. **Reassure Your Child About Pickup** – Make sure your child knows exactly who will pick them up and when.
10. **Talk About the Daily Schedule** – Review what your child can expect throughout the day, such as snack time, playtime, and storytime.
11. **Include a Special Note** – If your child is bringing a lunch or snack, add a small surprise like a note, drawing, or sticker for encouragement.
12. **Plan a Calm Morning** – Allow extra time to get ready so the morning feels relaxed rather than rushed. Eating a good breakfast will also help set a positive tone.

### **On the First Day**

13. **Check for a Gradual Start** – Some schools stagger start days, allowing only part of the class to attend at a time. Find out if this is an option to help ease the transition.
14. **Know Your Limits** – If your child is particularly nervous, ask if you can stay for a few minutes before saying goodbye—but keep it brief.
15. **Leave with Confidence** – Once you say goodbye, avoid lingering or peeking through windows. If your child senses hesitation, it may make the separation harder.
16. **Bring Tissues** – This milestone might be tougher on you than on your child! Be prepared for a few emotional moments.

By taking proactive steps to prepare, you can help your child feel more comfortable and confident as they start this new adventure. And remember—those first-day jitters don't last forever. Before you know it, your child will be running into the classroom with excitement!