

# Goodbye Without Tears

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The first day of preschool has as many emotional ups and downs as an episode of Grey's Anatomy. You're psyched to see your child become more independent, but saying goodbye that first morning -- if not week -- is a gut-wrenching experience for most moms and dads.

"There will probably be some tears shed, either by the child or his parents -- or both," says Muriel Johnson, a teacher at Monteverde School, in Berkeley, California. "For many kids, being dropped off with total strangers in an unfamiliar environment can be scary. Their parents, meanwhile, are hopeful that their child will be loved and cared for, but they don't actually know the teachers yet. They're anxious too, and kids will sense that."

Happily, there are things you can do to make goodbye time less painful. We turned to the experts and asked experienced preschool teachers across the country for advice on drop-off do's and don'ts to keep in mind for the beginning of the school year. Read them and (don't) weep.

Three and 4-year-olds aren't big on surprises unless they come with shiny paper and a bow. To lessen your kid's anxiety about starting school, share as much information as possible about what the classroom experience will be like. "Children who are ready for the big day are going to be more comfortable right off the bat," says Lisa Andersen, a teacher at KinderCare Learning Center in Westmont, Illinois. If possible, make an appointment to visit your child's preschool at least once before his start date, exploring the space and getting to know some of the new faces. Teachers agree that it's much easier for a child to be left at school without Mom or Dad once he's had the physical experience of being there with a parent. If your kid does meet his teacher-to-be, take a snapshot of the two of them and frame it at home to make her seem like part of the family.

Some preschools provide a printout of the daily schedule. Hang it on the fridge and talk through it with your child in a matter-of-fact way: After I drop you off, you'll have circle time followed by a snack, then time to make art or play in the playground. "The more familiar your kid is with the routines and terminology of preschool, the more likely he'll be to have the experience of 'Aha! I know what this activity is. I know what comes next,'" explains Andersen.

But beware: The first day of school may hit you harder than it does your child. Hashing out your worries with sympathetic parent friends -- whether it's that your kid's going to miss you too much or that now that he's in preschool he'll no longer need his mommy -- will help lighten the load and make the initial drop-off easier for everyone involved.