

# Preschool Adjustment

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For quite a few years, now, I have seen many little ones join our preschool program. They come in all shapes and sizes, and each has his/her own unique personality, too. For some, the transition into our preschool program seems most natural, while others need time, patience, and comforting, to adjust to the new people, environment and routines.

At Laurel Academy, we suggest that parents of preschoolers think about those first few weeks of school beforehand, and decide what approach they will take with respect to introducing their child to his/her new school.

Several factors will influence this decision, including parents' schedules and availability and the child's level of experience with other child-care arrangements, including babysitters, playgroups, and daycares.

For simplicity's sake, we have named the two approaches we recommend (both are described in more detail on the next page):

1. **"Kiss & See You Later"** – This approach will better suit parents who have limited time to help their child adjust.
2. **"Gradual Adjustment"** – This route may be more appropriate for a child who is very young or who has minimal experience with child-care.

We leave it to parents to choose the approach that works for them and their child, but we will certainly provide advice and guidance when we are able to, and we welcome you to come in and talk with us about your situation, concerns, and ideas, in order that we may work together to settle your child into our program.

A couple of guidelines must be followed, no matter which approach is to be used:

1. Always tell your child when you are leaving. *Sneaking out on your child is harmful* because it teaches him/her not to trust you and generates additional anxiety and fear. Your child will learn not to take his/her eyes off of you, lest you "disappear".
2. Once you say you're going to leave, do it according to your word. This is hard, especially if your child cries and tries to cling to you. But if your child learns that such displays control your behavior, he/she will not soon cease. Instead, your child will have discovered a useful tool that will only escalate in response to further attempts to leave.

## As We Move Ahead with Your Child

Please remember that our teachers will do what they can to take care of your child and settle him/her into our classroom and routine! They'll give him/her a lap to sit on, plenty of hugs, toys to amuse him/her, and they'll try to pair him/her up with a playmate, too! Feel free to let your child's teacher know of any techniques or strategies that you have had success with, and our teachers will give you their feedback and support, as well.

## The “Kiss & See You Later” Approach

This is sort of like going "cold turkey". It requires dropping your child off at school, telling him/her you'll be back later, giving him/her a kiss and a hug, and then *leaving promptly*.

### What to expect:

While some children are perfectly fine right from the first day (causing Mommy and Daddy to wonder exactly what they've done to deserve such indifference), most won't be too happy at first. Parents can expect clinging and tears, and that's difficult for everybody. A few children may even be gleeful at drop-off that first day, dazzled by all the colors, toys, and children, only to revert to tears the second day, after having realized that they would like the colors, toys, children, AND Mommy and Daddy, thank you very much.

Children usually adjust fairly quickly, however, and even though the morning tears may persist, first thing, for a few days to a couple of weeks, they usually stop just minutes after the parent departs each morning.

If you choose the "Kiss & See You Later" approach, we strongly recommend the following:

- If your child is enrolled for a full-day program, you might start him/her off with half-days for up to five days, depending on the child's maturity and adjustment.
- Be prepared for a few days of teary eyes, and feel free to check in with the school by telephone mid-morning to find out how your child is doing: Very often, smiles appear within minutes of the parent's departure!

## The “Gradual Adjustment” Approach

For parents who can make the time, the Gradual Adjustment approach may be the preferred way to introduce a child to our preschool program. Here, one parent/nanny/caregiver joins the preschooler in class for anywhere from a couple of half-days to a week or more, depending on the child's needs and adjustment.

### What to Expect:

In this case, your child's teacher will place a chair in the classroom where you can sit and make like a stationary (albeit living and breathing) security blanket. If, initially, your child wants to stand next to you for the whole time you're there -- fine! If your child wanders off tentatively for a few seconds at a time before scurrying back -- that's fine, too! If your child walks confidently away to join a group of seasoned preschoolers -- well, that is also fine!

If your child doesn't fall into this latter group (departing confidently and wondering why you're still there), it's important to keep calm and relax. Don't push your little one away, or drag him/her over to the group, for that will create conflict between you and your child, which will, in turn, make him/her less happy. With the "Gradual Adjustment" approach, the child adjusts at his/her own pace.

It may take a couple of days, but once your child is comfortable enough to leave you and join the group for at least ten minutes at a time, this is when you may begin leaving your child for short periods of no more than two minutes at a time, at first. Start off by leaving the room perhaps every half-hour, and gradually increase these absences to 15 or 20 minutes, three or four times in a half-day.

Always, always tell your child, just before you leave the room that you are going, and that you will be back. You might also wish to give a plausible reason for leaving. For example, "Taylor, Mommy has to go to the bathroom, but I'll be right back." And then, don't hesitate! Just go -- even if your child tries to prevent you. But, make sure you come back just as you said you would, too.

If you choose the "Gradual Adjustment" approach, we strongly recommend the following:

- Bring a book or something else you can do in the classroom that will not distract or interest the children.
- Don't worry if your child clings to you at first; soon enough, he/she will become curious about what everybody else is doing.