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Connecting Big Plans' Parents to their Communities

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The Drop-Off: A Guide to Happier Good-Byes

Some children bound into a new classroom without a backward glance. But many others are, understandably, a little more nervous about starting a new school with new friends and new teachers. It's not only children who have a hard time parting ways for the day. The morning drop off can be hard on adults, too. Luckily, teachers and staff have a lot of experience with supporting children during the first days at school.

Here are some positive ways to say good-bye at school that will help put everyone at ease. Because when your child is happier, so are you.

1. Try a practice day.

Speak with your center director about scheduling a drop-in day or partial day shortly before you return to work. This gives you and your child a chance to test out spending time apart. This also allows you to focus on her needs (and your own feelings) without the added pressure of having to get to the office.

2. Take care of your own feelings.

If you're anxious about leaving, your child may start to feel anxious as well. During these early days, think about ways you can ease our own worries about the drop off: Talk with friends or other parents with young children, go to the movies, or go for a walk. Of course, you may still get a little teary-eyed at drop-off and that's totally fine and completely normal.

3. Be an early bird.

Some children do best when a parent limits the amount of time spent saying good-

bye. Other children want the reassurance of a parent's presence in the classroom until they feel more comfortable. Find what works for you both, and if your child needs more time, arrive early to help him adjust to the transition.

4. Focus on your child.

In the bustle of drop-off—unloading diapers, delivering daily instructions, depositing an extra sweater—it's easy to get distracted. At drop off, take a little time to focus your attention on your child. Get down at her level and be with her before saying good-bye. This can help her relax and ease her fears.

5. Discover the classroom together.

Commenting with enthusiasm about the children's art work on the wall, the sand table, or greeting teachers and other children warmly, communicates to your child that school is a fun and



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exciting place. If you are curious and positive, it encourages him to be, too.

6. Take a little time to really say good-bye.

Slipping away while she isn't looking can make her more anxious when she can't find you. Let your child know you are leaving and that you will be back. Be clear and matter-of-fact: "I'm going to leave in five minutes and go to work. I'll come back and pick you up after you've eaten lunch."

7. Acknowledge their feelings.

Children show emotion through crying, and it's normal for them to do so. Acknowledging their emotions is an important part of helping them cope with morning transitions. You might say: "I see that you're sad that I'm leaving. I will miss you too. I'll be back after you have recess this afternoon to pick you up."

8. Talk about the good stuff.

Remind your child of the fun things he'll do that day: "Wow! You're going to paint at the easel today! What do you think you'll paint?" Talk him through the classroom schedule. Routines are comforting for young children, and his worries at school will lessen as he learns what to expect.

9. Ask for advice.

Your child's teachers and center director have helped many other families just like yours. As the teachers get to know your child, they can direct her to a favorite activity that will help her settle more easily into the classroom. Center Directors can offer advice if your child needs more support. Be patient as you and your family find your way.

10. Call us.

Feel free to check in to see how your child's day is going. Moments after you leave, he may be completely engrossed in building a block tower. Call us! Chances are that he's doing well, and you'll have a better day knowing he is having a good day.

If you have had tough transitions, remember that it gets better! Try and have patience—and stay positive—while everyone adjusts. A few weeks from now, you will walk into the classroom and your child will wriggle out of your arms, ready to start her school day. You are not alone and you're doing great.

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STORYTIME AT THE CALGARY ZOO

Head to the Calgary Zoo Karsten Discovery Centre atrium at the North entrance to listen to great zoo and animal stories. Every Thursday, zoo education volunteers read from a selection of wonderful children's books and share amazing animal artifacts that children can see and touch.

Storytime for Ages: 3 - 5

Date: Thursdays

Time: 10:30 - 11:00 a.m.

Price: Free

A voluntary donation of \$2 per child is appreciated and will help the Calgary Zoo in purchasing more books for the storytime program.



Healthy Nut-Free Kid-Approved Snacks

Are you looking for a nutrition-packed nut-free snack to send with your child to preschool? Try a Butterfly Snack Bag. Have your child help you prepare this fun, creative, and healthy snack!

1. Fill the snack bag with a healthy snack (like cheese cubes and carrots or grapes and crackers).
2. Pinch the middle of the snack bag so that the top and bottom of the bag come together and put into a clothes pin.
3. Add googly eyes and a pipe cleaner to the clothes pin for extra fun.



(Photo Credit: www.squawkfox.com)

The Importance of Sleep

“Forty percent of adults suffer from sleep problems at some point, and children are not exempt. But we don’t ask about it,” acknowledges Val Kirk, who heads the pediatric sleep clinic at Alberta Children’s Hospital in Calgary. “We teach children about good nutrition and about physical activity. But not sleep. Sleep,” she says, “is a big issue.”

Like adults, when children don’t get adequate sleep they get crabby, can’t concentrate and, some research shows, become more accident-prone. A lack of sleep also leads to a weakened immune system, welcoming more colds and sick-like symptoms.

Other studies suggest that sleep stimulates brain development and helps both memory and learning – and a lack of sleep can affect this process by as much as 20 to 50 percent. Some areas affected directly by lack of sleep are original and flexible thinking, reasoning, and problem solving. While it can be tricky, getting a handle on sleep issues as early as possible is worth it. Research shows that 1 in 10 children are snoozing at their desks some time throughout the day.

The following information from the National Sleep Association outlines the average sleep needs for kids and adults: Just as with adults, children’s sleep needs vary somewhat from one individual to another, but some general guidelines do apply. As kids move from the baby phase to the toddler stage, and then to the elementary school and early middle school years, their sleep needs decline a bit. Yet, they still need a lot of shut-eye for their growing brains and bodies. While there’s no exact number of hours that every child should get, it’s smart to keep these age-by-age ranges in mind:

Newborns (0 – 2 months)	12 – 18 hours
Infants (3 – 11 months)	14 – 15 hours
Toddlers (1 – 3 years)	12 – 14 hours
Preschoolers (3 – 5 years)	11 – 13 hours
School-aged Children (5 – 10 years)	10 – 11 hours
Teens (10 – 17 years)	8.5 – 9.25 hours
Adults	7 – 9 hours

Between ages one and two: Toddlers typically need 11 to 14 hours of sleep per day. Most of this occurs at night, but most kids of this age do still need a nap that ranges from one to three-and-a-half hours long.

Between ages three and five: Preschool-age children usually need 11 to 13 hours of slumber per day. At age three, many kids are still napping, at age four, some are still napping, but most give up the habit by age five.

Between ages six and 13: During the elementary and early middle school years, kids typically require nine to 11 hours of sleep per day (and all of it at night).

To help your child get the sleep that he or she needs, develop a calming bedtime ritual that might include taking a bath, putting on PJs, brushing teeth, and reading a story. It’s also wise to stick with a consistent bedtime. This will help set the stage for a good night’s sleep, night after night.

It’s important to note that teens generally need more shut-eye, compared with their younger siblings. If you have a kid who is in high school, make sure that he or she is on a healthy sleep schedule.

*Article Courtesy of Parenting Power:
www.parentingpower.ca*



5 WAITING GAMES FOR KIDS

Do you hate getting caught waiting in a long line with your kids without something to keep them (and you) from going crazy! Don’t feel you have to resort to brain dulling screen time. You need some brain tickling waiting games! Keep the whole family laughing and having fun and keep these play anywhere games in your virtual back pocket.

1 There is a story in my purse!
Choose three items from your purse and challenge kids to invent a story around those three items.

2 How many can you name?
Name a category and your child has 10 seconds to name as many things in that category as possible. Make categories general (“animals”) for young kids, and specific (“animals with no teeth”) for older kids.

3 Magazine hunt.
When in a waiting room with magazines, turn the magazine into a scavenger hunt. Instruct kids to find certain items. “Find something purple that starts with a C,” or “find a blue animal.”

4 Scrap of paper drop.
Drop a small scrap of paper. Kids try to catch it with two fingers before it hits the ground.

5 Penny drop.
Take out a penny and try to drop it so it lands on your shoe without falling off.

www.whatdowedoallday.com/2016/03/waiting-games-for-kids.html

10 Strategies To Help Children with Sensory Processing Disorders Head To School

Children who have autism spectrum disorders may have sensory issues that impact getting ready in the morning and school functioning. Here are 10 strategies to help them ease into the school day and while they are there.

1) Select school clothes the night before. Tagless and compression-style clothing are often good choices. Turning socks/underwear inside out, or letting your child sleep in the clothes for the next day can be a big help!

2) Begin your morning with deep pressure massage, calming/alerting music, and/or movement input (animal walks to breakfast, jumping jacks, swinging, etc.).

3) Sensory-friendly classrooms are important. Natural lighting and/or light covers for fluorescent lights are helpful. Make teachers aware that overcrowded walls and strong smells (perfume, deodorant, or food) may be overstimulating for children with hypersensitivities. Sensory earmuffs can help with noise reduction.

4) Encourage seating alternatives like ball chairs and air cushions to provide calming/alerting movement input.

5) Incorporate movement and deep pressure throughout the day with classroom chores (stacking chairs, erasing whiteboards, delivering library books, etc.). Do warm-up activities like jumping jacks or "Simon Says" before sedentary activities.

6) Use weighted and deep pressure tools (weighted vests, lap pads, pressure vests, compression clothing, or weighted backpacks) to provide calming, organizing input throughout the day.

7) Oral input creates rhythm and is a powerful sensory regulator. Incorporate

water bottles, gum, crunchy snacks, chewy pencil toppers, chewable jewelry, etc.

8) Subtle, silent classroom fidgets can be effective in keeping restless fingers busy, bodies relaxed, and minds focused! Ask your OT!

9) Children with sensory issues often have difficulty standing in line because of tactile hypersensitivity or may struggle in the cafeteria due to the noise or smells. Educate lunchroom aides, bus drivers, teachers, and paraprofessionals about your child's specific sensory needs. Be sure sensory responses aren't being misinterpreted as behavior issues. Your child may benefit from changing classes early, having an assigned bus seat up front, and getting on the bus last and off first. A 10-minute break after lunch in a quiet, separate space can provide an easy way to reset your child's nervous system.

10) Every child is a gift! Help others recognize your child's uniqueness and celebrate it!



Written by: Jan Artman LaPrade, MS, OTR/L. Jan has been an OT for over 20 years, working in the schools for most of her career. Reprinted from: <http://www.nwkidsmagazine.com/2012/10/ot-tips-and-sensory-strategies-for-school-success/>

Back to School Sensory Strategies for Teachers

It's back to school and the children are arriving and you have spent all this time decorating your classroom. During the first week, you notice that one of your kids is squinting at the board and doesn't seem to be paying attention. You notice another child is staring off at the busy bulletin board looking at the bright colors and you have another child who cannot sit still in their seat and is constantly bouncing around. What are you supposed to do??!

- **Movement Breaks** Incorporate sensory movement breaks throughout the day into your lesson plans. For math, have the children jump to count and go through an obstacle course to read sight words (i.e. walk across a balance beam, jump over a log, climb up onto the bean bag, call out the flash card sight word and throw a bean bag into the bucket).
- **Visual Distraction** If you have a child who is visually distracted by stimuli, maybe move their seat, or make sure your classroom is not overloaded with stuff on the walls. It doesn't have to be boring white, but too much in the classroom can be overwhelming for a sensory sensitive child.
- **For the Mover & Shaker**, have them sit on a therapy ball, or a move-n-sit in his/her chair. Give them a fidget toy to squish to help them pay attention and create rules around not throwing it, or pulling it out to distract other children.
- **For a child that seems like they are not listening**, see if the OT or Speech therapist can help with possibility of auditory processing issues. That child may need 30 extra seconds to process what you are saying to them, or it may be hard for them to filter out what you are saying from the lawn mower outside.

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