

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION

Taking the huge step to have your little one start a daycare program can be an exciting and emotional milestone! Where did the time go? There are lots of things to think about as we plan for this next phase of our child's journey. We've addressed some ways to prepare for the big day and help the transition go more smoothly for you and for your little one.

- What steps do you need to take to ensure that you have everything needed for the first day of daycare?
- How can you prepare your child for the first days and weeks of daycare?
- How can you build a good rapport and foster open communication with caregivers and staff?
- How do you know if your child is happy at daycare?
- How can you take care of yourself and prepare for this transition?

What steps do I need to take to ensure that I have everything needed for the first day of daycare?

This can feel like a very busy time! It can be a roller coaster of emotions on top of a mounting to do list of preparational tasks. To make things easier for yourself, you should talk with your daycare provider at least two weeks before your little one's first day and ask for a list of things the daycare recommends you bring on the first day. This list may include diapers, bottles, clothing and personal care items along with emergency contact information, a completed medical health form and vaccination records. It may also be a good idea to label any personal items with your child's name ahead of time, in the event that something gets misplaced along the way.

How can I prepare my child for the first days and weeks of daycare?

Start to talk to your child about this new place that they are going to go to. Set a positive tone about how much fun they are going to have, all the exciting things that they are going to learn and how there are going to be other kids to make friends with! Even if your child is too young to fully comprehend what you are saying, your positive tone and vibe makes all the difference. It can also be important to bring your little one to the daycare for a visit before the big day. This will help them to become familiar with their surroundings and get to know their caregivers and the other children. Familiar faces can be a big help. Some daycare centers offer the option of a phase-in type of schedule where you can slowly build up to a full day of care. Creating a 'goodbye routine' ahead of time and walking through and supporting expectations can help when the time actually comes for goodbyes. You can also ask the center if your child can bring their favorite toy, book or photos of you so that they have something with them that gives them comfort.

How can I build a good rapport and foster open communication with caregivers and staff?

When you have open communication with your child's caregivers and daycare staff, it creates a bond and sense of trust between you and them. Communication and honesty helps to build a strong and respected relationship. It is important that both you and your little one's caregivers feel comfortable sharing questions or concerns that come up. It may not seem like it, but when we engage and bring our caregivers into the conversation we help to show them how much we appreciate and trust all that they are doing for our children. And, the reality is that this positive relationship is the key to an enriching and rewarding experience for your child!

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Most daycare providers have an established method of communication with parents. This may be a written daily progress report or an online document. These daily progress reports share your little one's routine, what they ate, the curriculum being covered, how they interacted with friends and any behavior concerns or special achievements. There may be times when this is not enough and you are looking for a discussion or 'check in' that provides you with insight on a specific topic. You may be hesitant to ask for more information because you feel that the caregivers are busy, but remember that keeping the lines of communication open and talking on a regular basis supports the common goal of helping your child grow, learn and be the best they can be. There are many ways in which to communicate with your child's caregiver that can be unique to the daycare center's culture. Some centers offer email, accommodate regular conference times or prefer face-to-face communication during drop off and pick up. The best way to determine what method of communication works is to discuss that with your daycare provider directly.

How do I know if my child is happy at daycare?

There have been numerous studies showing the long term academic and social benefits of daycare programs. Studies show that children who had "high-quality child care" were four times more likely to graduate college with a degree! So in the long-term there are benefits to daycare, but how do we know that our little one is happy now and thriving from the experience at this moment? There are behaviors that help us to gauge how they are connecting and if they are happy and content. Are they excited to go to daycare in the morning or talk favorably about going? Or simply, are they not complaining about going or being there? Are there smiles or tears? Do they seem to have friends and approach other kids to interact? Does your little one jump into the activities and things that are already happening in the room when they get there? It can be a little easier to know how your child is doing if they have the ability to verbalize their feelings, are mobile and can be interactive, but with infants it may not be as obvious. There are ways in which we can make observations and check our infant's level of contentment. Is your baby showing a new skill that they may have learned? Do they favor a certain caregiver and seem secure with them? Is your little one smiling and not tearful when you leave or arrive again? Are they maintaining their routines and napping and eating on schedule? And most importantly, do they seem alert and engaged with the environment around them?

How can I take care of and prepare myself for this transition?

Even though we are focusing on the critical tasks ahead; preparing for the first days of daycare, settling into the daily routine, and ensuring that the little one's physical and emotional wellbeing is supported, it is important to not lose sight of yourself. This exciting milestone may come with a host of feelings and thoughts such as pangs of guilt, doubt, excitement and relief. The experience and how we feel about this next step in the little one's life is unique to us. So, this is a time to lean into your support system and share your feelings, thoughts and emotions with those in your life that you trust and can depend on. When we take care of ourselves, we can also be stronger and more prepared to take care of the ones we love most. By selecting the right daycare center to meet your child's needs, building relationships and communicating with your little one's caregivers and helping to make your child's transition a positive and smooth one, you will be taking all the right steps in supporting yourself and your little one through this next exciting journey!