

What to Expect the First Few Weeks of School

The beginning of a new school year is always an exciting time for families. As summer draws to a close please begin to prepare yourselves and your children for the transition back to school. Help build anticipation and excitement in your children, stressing the great things they will get to do this year at school. Help to alleviate anxiety by practicing your 'new daily routine' prior to the start of school. Help build your child's confidence by reassuring them of the growth they have made this summer. Together the staff at Schoolhouse Montessori Academy and our families can assure a successful start to the 2009-2010 school year.

For starters, remember that both you and your child will need time to get used to the new setup. Try to be patient; even if you make every effort to prepare your child, it will probably be a few days before they come skipping over to you at pick-up time, more eager to show you their work from the day than to go home.

Here are some tips to help the first day and first few weeks go smoothly:

- If you're starting a job or going back to work when your child enters the program, explain what you'll be doing while they are there.
- Sometimes kids worry that their parents won't be able to find them. Make sure your child understands that you know how to get to the center or school from wherever you'll be, and that you know how to call the place as well. You may also want to mention that the grown-ups in charge will be able to call you if it's ever necessary.
- Be clear about who will pick them up and when. Find out from the director or teacher what the last event of the day will be, and tell your child that they'll see you after the group does this activity.
- Never sneak away when it's time to say goodbye, even if they are having a great time. Give them a quick kiss (as long as it won't embarrass them) and a cheerful "See you after the sing-along." If they cry, scream, or cling to you, be supportive ("I know this is a little scary") but firm and calm. It's often helpful to develop a brief goodbye ritual -- waving through the window or blowing a kiss from the doorway -- so your child knows what to expect and you're not swayed to drag it out.
- Once you've left, don't come back until it's time for your child to go home.
- Arrive a little early to pick her up during the first week or so, and from then on, take steps to ensure you're never late. Two minutes of waiting can seem excruciating to a child when "all the other kids" are gleefully greeting their parents.

How can I tell if my child is adjusting?

On the way home, ask your child what was fun or special about the day. Ask which kids she likes playing with. (Don't ignore the negative, though: If she hints that she doesn't like something or someone, encourage her to tell you about it.) If your child isn't forthcoming, don't pester her. Just stay open to anything she wants to say. Take every opportunity to visit the center or school

and to have a friendly chat with the adults in charge. Instead of telling them how you think your child is getting along, ask their opinions and show that you're open to suggestions on how you might help your child have the best possible experience.

What if my child has trouble adjusting?

- Be patient. Some kids cry at every parting -- or every reunion -- for a while. Ask the director or teacher whether your child seems to be enjoying themselves the rest of the time. Here are some other suggestions that may help:
- Don't criticize the instructors or program in front of your child. If they hear you complaining about the pick-up rules or saying that her teacher is thick (even if they don't know what that means), they'll feel uneasy and resist settling in. Your child needs to feel that you approve of the place and trust the people they spend so much time with.
- Keep your child's attendance regular. If you let them skip school because they begged for a day at home or stayed up too late the night before, they'll likely give you problems any time they don't quite feel like going. It's actually tougher on most kids if they think they have some choice in the matter; each morning they stew over whether to raise a fuss about staying home. Make it clear that you expect they go unless they're too sick.
- If your child continues to be anxious, try to find out if there's a specific issue. They may be at odds with another child in the group, or perhaps they misunderstood a rule and fears they can't comply with it. If your child is having trouble making friends, see if they'd like to invite other children in the program over on the weekend. Watch how they play with other kids: Do they show off, boss them around, or try too hard to make them like him/her? While it's a bit painful to recognize disagreeable behavior in your own child, it can offer a good opportunity to guide her gently toward developing social skills.
- The adjustment period can take several weeks, but if you are consistent with your expectations the anxiety will gradually decrease.

What is my child doing the first few weeks of school?

Beginning with their first few moments within the classroom your child is actively engaged. They begin by learning the ground rules of the classroom, getting to know their peers, teachers and learning their daily routine. During this time their lead teachers are assessing them for placement within the Montessori curriculum and giving them their first lessons. Please note that the Montessori environment is a "hands-on" one, so if you do not see paperwork coming home often, know that your child is still working within the classroom, but that they may be not at the paperwork stage of a particular work area (language, math, science, etc.)

Reference: Tonia Moore: Helping your child to adjust. Consume Health Interactive