

Prep Talk: Preparing for Preschool

With preschools starting back up, we thought we would give you a few hints and pointers to “prep” your child for the transition. Here is a short list of ideas and suggestions we compiled from teachers at Austin area preschools.

“The Dreaded Drop-off”

It is a good idea to promptly leave when you bring your child to school. After dropping off the backpack, give your child a loving hug and goodbye. Long good-byes are hard on your child, the rest of the class, yourself, and the teacher. Your child may cry for a short time when you leave, but it usually doesn't last long. (You can always call up to the school to check on your child) Jan Stovall, director of Tarrytown United Methodist Church Mother's Day Out Program suggests, “Before dropping your child off, discuss with the child ahead of time that you will be leaving them and that you will be returning after lunch/nap time, and that you will give them a hug and kiss and then go.” Also, it is good to get in the habit of walking your toddler into school rather than carrying your child in your arms.

Overall Suggestions:

- It is important that all food items, bottles, cups, spoons, containers, pacifiers, blankets and any other personal items be clearly labeled with your child's name.
- Children are working on self-help skills, so containers they can open themselves are best. Please remember spoons and forks if needed.
- Always send a complete change of clothes (including socks) that are weather and size appropriate.
- In order to keep up with schedule changes, teachers' meetings, special occasions or specific instructions, read all notes sent home.
- Put your child in clothes that can get dirty or have paint spills without worry.
- If your child cannot tie his/her shoes, consider sending them in a Velcro style, closed-toe shoe. Closed toe shoes are a must at most preschools.
- Have your child bring a small backpack or carry bag for artwork and notes sent home.
- Some Preschools are trying to become more eco-friendly. Try to be more “green” in your lunch-packing by cutting down on disposable containers and packaging, drink boxes, water bottles, etc. by putting items in reusable containers.

In the Nursery:

- When packing extra diapers, it is helpful to teachers to label the diapers with your child's name.
- As your child develops, send finger food as soon as it is appropriate. This fosters eye-hand coordination and aids in the child's development of a sense of independence.
- Be flexible about your child's schedule. Once in the nursery, babies are stimulated by a different environment and interaction with other babies and teachers. The children may eat and/or sleep on a more flexible schedule.

For the Toddlers:

- For nap time, send a comfort item such as a pacifier, favorite doll, pillow, and "lovey" that they are used to having at home.
- If your child has cubbies, ask the teacher if you can leave a complete change of clothes at school in a gallon-size labeled Ziploc bag. Be sure to change it out as the weather changes.
- Use thick cloth training pants when you start potty training. Pull-ups prevent the child from knowing when he/she has urinated, and prolongs potty training. Pack extra clothes when potty training. Teachers are very supportive and a great help during this time.
- Send your child's lunch in a divided container (small plate size) that has a lid.
- So food isn't wasted, pack proportion-sized meals
- If you want to see how much your child is eating at lunch, ask the teacher to please leave leftovers in lunch containers.
- To keep food/drink cold, pack a small ice pack to keep food chilled. Most classrooms keep lunches at room temperature.

For Three and Four-Year-Olds:

- Remember to keep clothing simple. It's hard to make it to the bathroom if there are too many buttons, belts, and bows in the way. Dress for active, sometimes messy, activities and dress according to the weather.
- Children don't need to bring too much. Cubby space is limited. Also, they carry their own things so don't weigh them down! (3's don't really need adult sized backpacks)

Food Tips:

If you will be packing a lunch for your child here is a list of foods you may want to **avoid sending**.

- food that needs to be heated
- food that needs to be mixed (tuna salad cup)
- yogurt/squeezeable yogurt or squeezable applesauce
- lunchables (may include pieces of candy and “processed” foods)
- fruit that needs to be cut up or peeled (whole apples, grapes, or oranges)
- large drink boxes, Capri Sun drink pouches
- full pre-packaged snack items (a whole bag is too big of a portion)
- cookies, candy, pudding
- nuts, many schools prohibit nuts

Foods/drinks that we feel **are best to send** in your child’s lunch:

- sandwiches cut in 1/2 or 1/4
- cut up vegetables and fruits
- crackers
- cheese sticks or cubes
- yogurt eaten with a spoon (don’t forget the spoon!)
- reusable cup for water or screw top bottles (the squeeze tops leak)

Starting a new preschool can be just as overwhelming for the parents as it can be for the child. We also suggest volunteering up at the school when parent volunteers are needed. It is a great way to get to know the directors, teachers, and other parents.

Of course, all preschool programs have their own “policies and procedures” handbook and we suggest you to read it in detail, as they are filled with important information and may contain great tips for their specific curriculum