



Preparing for Preschool

August 2009

The Anne Arundel County

Tot's Line

1-877-817-8687

www.totsline.org

Transitioning to Preschool

Routine and Structure

If we could stress one area in raising children it is to provide them with routine and structure. Both make a better behaved child. With routine and structure, children are able to anticipate what to expect, taking all the guess work out of many situations.

Routine and Structure provides children with a sense of security and safety, helping build their self esteem and self confidence. Children with a high self confidence are able to handle change better. Change and transition is a part of everyday life. They can be big or small, good or bad. No matter what the change, preparation makes the transition go smoother.

Children often have a difficult time dealing with change and transition because they are often unprepared for them. When there is an opportunity to prepare, we as parents, can help make it go smoother.

First of all, the more comfortable the parents are with the decision to go to school, the more comfortable your child will be. Talk with them. Let them share your excitement. Have them meet their teachers and hear the routine at school. Although, some children may not grasp the routine until they experience it, it will help them when they get to school. Arrange time for them to explore the classroom in the safety of your presence. This can happen the first day or prior.

On the first day, reintroduce them to their teachers. Stay just a few minutes for them to become comfortable. Look to the teachers for direction. If they suggest it is a good time to leave, then do so.

At home, establish a new school routine. When you pick up your child, make sure you have some time to hear about their day. This could be done at

lunch or snack time. It is a great opportunity to reconnect with them.

The new routine should also allow your child plenty of sleep. Healthy sleep habits are a great foundation for success in school. The routine should include time to settle down before going to bed. Reading a book is another way to reconnect and also establish an important habit.

Prior to bedtime, pick out clothes for the next day and have them ready. Give your child a couple of options to choose from. Having some control over what to wear minimizes behavior problems (especially in the morning as you try to get out of the home.) Being prepared helps control the new morning routine.

For more information, please read "Tips for a Smoother Transition" on the other side.

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Healthy Snacks and Lunches

It is not only important to send your children to school as mentally prepared as possible, but also physically prepared as well. Children thrive and succeed when they have a variety of healthy food IN CHILD-SIZE PORTIONS. When we offer children portions that are fit for an adult, it often becomes overwhelming and they don't eat anything. Make sure you serve them the size for their little

bodies. On average, about 2 tablespoons of one item is an adequate size portion for a child.

Offer fruits, vegetables, whole-grain breads, cereal, low-fat yogurt, milk and protein.

Give your child a healthy meal each day before leaving for school. If you have trouble affording healthy foods, you may be able to get help. Call 800-332-6347 for information about

food stamps or visit www.dhr.state.md.us. For information on the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children in Anne Arundel County, contact our local office at 410.222.6797.



Websites for healthy snack ideas

<http://www.cspinet.org/healthysnacks>

<http://kidshealth.org/kid/recipes/index.html>

<http://familyfun.go.com/recipes/kids/specialfeature/recipes-snacks>

<http://allrecipes.com/HowTo/Healthy-Snacks-for-Kids>



The Maryland State Dept. of Education is working to ensure every child in Maryland has access to pre-kindergarten programs regardless of their income level. To read extensively about this, follow this link at MSDE

http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/38C2D261-0C1C-45B6-BD7C-F4C1C3347F0E/14926/PreschoolforAllinMaryland_1207.pdf

Can't Afford the Childcare/Preschool Cost - Help is Available

When my husband and I first decided to have a baby, we were very lucky to have a friend who was a childcare provider. She was relatively inexpensive and good with our son. But, when he turned 3, we decided we wanted a more structured environment in a development center. At the same time, we had our 2nd little guy and had childcare expenses for him as well. Soon thereafter, came our 3rd son. At one point, we were paying more for our childcare expenses than we were our mortgage.

So, how do people afford childcare?

Well, if you are eligible, there are vouchers available to help cover the cost. This is through the Dept. of Social Services. You have to be 18 years old and have to be working or going to school. You have to meet the income guidelines. For a family of 4, the income guideline is \$35,702. If you receive temporary cash assistance, you are automatically eligible. You also have to comply with

child support. If you feel you may qualify for this, call 410-269-4500 and speak to someone in the Benefits Dept.

Another option is the Head Start Program through Friends of the Family. There are 7 locations throughout Anne Arundel County. Again, enrollment is based on either income, special needs or foster care situations. The income for a family of 4 is \$21,200. Transportation may be an option if you live in certain areas. The program is 3.5 hours a day for a 10 month period. There are AM and PM sessions, but the timeframe varies with each center.

Early Head Start is a program currently available in Shady Side. A new location in North County is coming soon. EHS serves children from birth to 3 years old and has similar guidelines as Head Start.

Contact the Tot's Line to find the location nearest you.

There is more available. Every high school in Anne Arundel

County has a child development lab. For a nominal fee, (\$30 or so/semester) your child can attend. The program is staffed by high school students who earn credit in their courses. It is supervised by a teacher or teachers at all times. This schedule is very flexible, according to the students needs.

Lastly, the county has a pre-kindergarten program. The child has to be 4 years old by Sept. 1st to enroll. There are 4 levels for admission: 1. poverty, 2. Limited English proficiency, 3. Home/health situation—death of a parent, low birth weight, IEP, etc and 4. Everyone else.

Depending on the school, the program could be full day or part day.

For both the child development labs and the prekindergarten program, you need to contact the school directly. Contact the Tot's Line to find the school in your area.

TIPS for a Smoother Transition

What an exciting milestone for your child to be making. Here are some helpful hints to make for a better transition.

♥Talk to your child about going to school. Tell him what he will be doing and what he can expect. Show him other children who go to school.

♥Go shopping together for a special bag, lunch box, or a special outfit to wear the first day.

♥Pack the bag together. Make sure you put a favorite snuggly in

the bag to cuddle up with at nap time.

♥For children who are having a very difficult time, give them a picture of Mom and Dad to have with them. Some schools will also put family pictures up on a board for the children to look at throughout the day.

♥When dropping your child off, do not stay too long. Help acclimate your child to her new classroom by showing her where to put her belongings. Introduce yourself and your child to the



teacher if you have not already met. Let your child know that you are leaving, but you will be back by lunchtime or before naptime. Say an upbeat goodbye.

Try to resist the urge to run back if your child is crying. This may prolong your child's stress. Have confidence the teacher can handle the situation. Call the school or center (even from the parking lot) if you are concerned.

It is difficult to watch our children walk away and take this big step. Preparation is the key to success for both the child and the parent..