

Moving from PRESCHOOL TO KINDERGARTEN

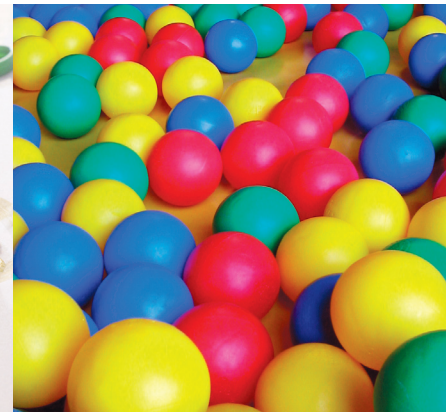
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PLANNING FOR STARTING SCHOOL AND NEW RELATIONSHIPS

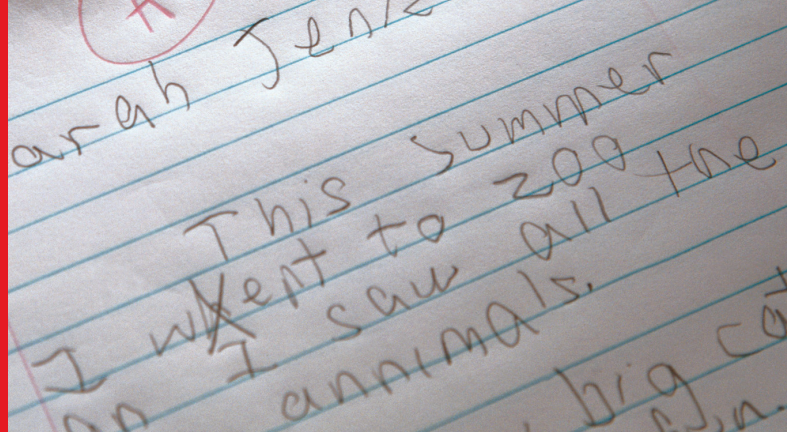
Leaving preschool to enter a more formal educational system represents a major transition for every parent and child. The environment will be new, challenges will be different and new relationships will be formed. While parents of children on the autism spectrum (ASD) initially may approach this time with trepidation, it actually represents an opportunity for learning and developing new friendships and relationships.



**PARENTS CAN FIND THEIR STATE DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION ONLINE AND CHECK THE STANDARDS FOR
KINDERGARTEN ; THIS WILL TELL YOU THE
FOCUS OF THE STANDARD CURRICULUM AND
WHERE YOUR CHILD MAY NEED ADDITIONAL
ASSISTANCE OR ADAPTATIONS.**

FOLLOWING ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS TO ENSURE A MORE SUCCESSFUL AND LESS STRESSFUL TRANSITION .

- Talk to the preschool teacher about how you can best prepare your child for the new curricular/environmental demands of kindergarten.
- Parents can find their state Department of Education on the Internet or Autism Source™ (www.autismsource.org) and check the standards for kindergarten; this will tell the focus of the standard curriculum and where your child will need additional assistance or adaptations. This also shows where parents might provide additional home instruction or practice, with direction from the classroom teacher, once the new school year has begun.
- Check out the National Center for Learning Disabilities-sponsored Web site, www.getreadytoread.org, for a checklist about home support for early literacy development. The site also contains a screening test.
- Inform the local director of special education in writing that you are enrolling a child with special needs for elementary school programming. List the child's special needs, such as challenges with understanding and/or using language, medical issues, the need for a nap, drowsiness during specific times of the day, sensory needs and distractions, responsiveness to visual supports such as schedules, impulsiveness, need for structure, need for supervision, difficulty paying attention in a noisy environment and so forth. A bulleted format may make it easier to notice each need. Parents can provide more detail when preparing a file folder for the teacher.
- Notice given to the special education director may result in the scheduling of one or more assessments (further assessment may not occur, however, if your child has attended that district's public school preschool program). You will be given a booklet about your rights under the federal law regarding special education services, but you may want to do more reading about such topics as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and a child's individual education program (IEP). Public libraries, bookstores, the Autism Society's Web site (www.autism-society.org) and special centers have materials that provide basic information.
- An IEP meeting will be scheduled to discuss your child's needs, goals and school classroom assignments. Parents are members of their child's educational team, which considers options and how to best accommodate specific needs. Educate yourself and be prepared to be involved as a team member. If desired, bring someone more experienced with you as an advocate.
- During the IEP meeting, ask if the special education program has an autism consultant(s). Find out who will provide support for your child's school, the type of support offered and how to contact the person so he or she can perhaps assist the classroom teacher. Ask when ASD training will be provided to the appropriate staff. As more children with ASD are entering public schools, more people have had previous training. Training is frequently offered after aides have been hired for the school term. Or, the training may occur after the school year has begun. Contact the Autism Society for additional information or suggestions, and visit its Web site for helpful materials.
- Tour the new school and meet the principal. Also, make a formal appointment with the principal so he or she can meet you, get a better understanding of your child's needs and begin building a positive relationship with your family. With advance preparation, the principal can talk about school rules and operations and how parents can be



involved in the school through volunteering, organizations and support for school functions.

- Provide opportunities for your child to become accustomed to the new playground before the transition, if the playground is open during non-school hours.
- Prepare a portfolio that contains easy-to-read information about your child. This is the time to supplement the material already prepared for the director of special education. List strengths, challenges, likes, dislikes, supports needed (and why), along with specific strategies. Keep the file limited to two to five pages. If you know which kindergarten teacher your child will have prior to the end of the preschool year, you may want to give the teacher the file and some references for books and videos about autism. Give a copy to the autism consultant, as well, if one is assigned to your child's school. In the fall, offer folders with the same information or portions of it to any person who would benefit from the information (e.g., music teacher, aide, occupational therapist, principal). Include your phone number and e-mail address. Indicate that you are always willing to work cooperatively to address any issues related to your child, and that you appreciate hearing about your child's successes.
- Check with your public library for children's books and videos about starting a new school year, particularly kindergarten. Potential titles for books can be obtained from the Web sites of chain booksellers, and information about a video can be obtained from the Web site, www.edpro.com.
- As the big day approaches, contact the teacher. Offer to help develop a picture schedule for the week. If the teacher has not previously had students with ASD, emphasize that having a schedule will make things easier for everyone. Enclose a sample schedule so there is no miscommunication. Of course, if your child hasn't already

been taught to use a schedule at home or preschool, then teaching this new skill on the first day may not be practical. Follow up to see if the teacher has any questions. Ask for a convenient time for your child and the teacher to meet before school starts.

- Establish a means and frequency of communication with the teacher. Let the teacher know what information is helpful for home. Be understanding if the teacher is unable to furnish more than a quick sentence or check-offs on a chart at the end of the day or week. Dismissal time is chaotic. Perhaps the teacher can e-mail you with more information at a more convenient time, but probably not on a daily basis. Information should flow both ways—if your child was up all night, the next school day is likely to be effected. Good communication helps others get a better understanding and respond appropriately.
- Ask how you can best support the teacher. Volunteer to provide training on ASD to staff or other students, lend books, help on field trips, produce the classroom newsletter, cut out materials and so forth. More specific to your child, offer tips on how to handle specific situations. The home environment is different than school, and sometimes the same strategies will not transfer effectively from one to the other—but providing consistency often is very beneficial.
- It may take time for the school staff to realize that you care about all the children and not just your own, that you want the school experience to be positive and productive for everyone. Make sure your actions reflect a concern for all involved, and that you use your expertise about your child to help in any given situation.

Keep a positive attitude about this new step for your child. Everyone wants a successful transition.

The Autism Society's Web site has a short publication, "Growing Up Together," available for elementary-aged children to gain a better understanding of a classmate or friend with autism.

Autism source™

#1 in Autism Information

LOOKING FOR AUTISM RESOURCES? VISIT WWW.AUTISMSOURCE.ORG

AUTISM SOCIETY

4340 East-West Highway, Suite 350
Bethesda, Maryland 20814
Phone: 301.657.0881 or
1.800.3AUTISM
Fax: 301.657.0869
Web: www.autism-society.org

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