Getting Ready for Readiness
Helping Preschoolers Make the Transition to Kindergarten

Five-year-old Jason walks with his mom to school on the first day of kindergarten. She tells him his new classroom is next to the media center. She smiles as they walk down the hall and Jason comments on all the things he saw on his visit to the school last spring. "I'm glad I followed the preschool teacher's advice and talked with Jason this summer about what kindergarten would be like," she thinks to herself. "So far, so good."

Preschool programs are committed to making sure that children enter kindergarten ready to learn. Not only is school readiness one of the goals established by the National Education Goals Panel in 1995, it is one of the guiding principles of the pre-K movement (see "Pre-K (What Exactly Is It?)" in Teaching Young Children, Volume 2, Number 1).

Over time, early childhood educators have broadened the definition of readiness. We know that children learn key skills in preschool that prepare...
them for success in the primary grades. But making sure children are developing the skills that support later learning is only a part of the picture. Readiness also includes emotional support for children from their families, teachers, and the school community.

For children to successfully move from preschool to kindergarten, they need to feel good about what is ahead, not overwhelmed by uncertainty and fear. This is where families and teachers come in. Just as important, elementary schools need to make themselves ready for incoming kindergartners. NAEYC (1995, 1) “believes it is the responsibility of schools to meet the needs of children as they enter school and to provide whatever services are needed . . . to help each child reach his or her fullest potential.”

Transition practices such as visiting a kindergarten class ahead of time are thought to help children better adjust to formal schooling. A 2008 report by researchers at the University of Virginia’s Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) examines this belief (LoCasale-Crouch et al. 2008). The report uses data from the National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) Multi-State Study of Pre-Kindergarten, which collected information on 722 children in 214 pre-kindergarten classrooms in six states.

One of the questions CASTL researchers examine in the report is the extent to which prekindergarten teachers use transition practices. They look at nine common transition practices included in the NCEDL data (see Clifford et al. 2005). All of these practices are identified in the NCEDL study as being socially and emotionally supportive activities. Teachers in the study reported using, on average, six of the nine transition practices. The most frequently reported practice (79% of teachers) was sharing written records of children’s prekindergarten experiences with kindergarten teachers. This practice was closely followed by prekindergarten teacher visits to kindergarten classrooms (78%) to observe and learn.

Using rating scales that measure teachers’ perceptions of children’s social competence and behavior problems, the CASTL researchers found a positive relationship between the number of transition practices used by preschool teachers and children’s adjustment in kindergarten. In general, children whose preschool teachers used more of the transition practices were judged
by their kindergarten teachers to have more social competencies and fewer behavioral problems than children whose preschool teachers used fewer transitional practices. This was particularly true for children whose families were at risk due to social and economic challenges.

**What this means for you**

As a preschool teacher, it’s time to think about how you can help children get ready to make the transition to kindergarten next fall. The skills children gain in your classroom will help them continue to learn about literacy, math, science, and more. But children also need your guidance to prepare socially and emotionally for the exciting, challenging, and perhaps daunting experiences that await them in kindergarten. Research-based suggestions appear below.

As you read over these suggestions, you may find that some will not work for your particular setting. In prekindergartens housed in public schools, for instance, teachers have ready access to kindergarten classrooms. Teachers may know which kindergarten teacher children will be assigned to. In these situations, it is relatively easy to coordinate transition activities.

For other programs, logistics can be more challenging. Children in your care may be going to several different kindergartens. When this happens, use a flexible transition approach. Take children to visit a nearby kindergarten to show them what a typical kindergarten is like. Explain that their own particular classroom and teacher may be somewhat different. Remember, the more children are prepared, the better their adjustment will be.

**These two recommended practices involve children directly.**

- **At circle times, introduce the topic of kindergarten.** Let children know what will be happening the following fall—having new teachers, going to a new room or even a new building, and so on. Be sure to answer questions, address fears, and prepare children for what a day in kindergarten will be like. Read books aloud that discuss this topic, such as *Welcome to Kindergarten*, by Anne Rockwell.

- **Take children on a tour of a kindergarten classroom in their new school.** Make sure children get to see the entire building, visit classrooms, and walk around the playground. Introduce them to school staff, such as the custodian and the librarian, and spend time watching and listening to a kindergarten in action. Before the visit, talk about what children will see and do and answer children’s questions. After the visit, do lots of follow-up activities, such as making a book using photographs taken on the tour. Children can recall and make sense of their visit by looking at the book again and again.

**Encourage families to support their children’s social and emotional transition to kindergarten.**

- **Hold a spring orientation program to familiarize families with kindergarten.** Share information about kindergarten teachers’ expectations and about the ways kindergarten is the same as preschool—and different.
By starting early and using a repertoire of transition techniques, preschool teachers can ease children’s adjustment to kindergarten. With this positive start, children will be primed for learning and well positioned to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

Parents need accurate and complete information to answer their children’s questions and to help the children prepare for a successful transition.

Meet individually with parents to address concerns, answer specific questions, and celebrate their child’s accomplishments and readiness to move on.

Work with the kindergarten teacher and the elementary school to support children’s transition to kindergarten.

Invite the kindergarten teacher to visit your class to see firsthand how your program works and the skills children have mastered and are learning and to become familiar with individual children’s approaches to learning, play, and having fun.

Work with the elementary school staff to sponsor an activity that includes the preschool children. Perhaps the staff can invite the children back to the school to see a bulletin board displaying the children’s photos or documenting the preschoolers’ visit to the kindergarten. It might also be possible to include the preschoolers in a school assembly at the end of the year. Making children feel like a part of the elementary school will ease their entrance into “the big children’s school.”

Make sure you are well informed about kindergarten curriculum and the teachers’ expectations.

As a first step, visit the kindergarten classrooms to know what the programs are like, so that you can talk to children and families with up-to-date information and specific details. Speak with kindergarten teachers and the elementary school principal to be sure that their expectations and yours are in sync.

Share children’s written records with their kindergarten teachers (with written permission from parents or guardians, of course). This will ensure that kindergarten teachers have full knowledge of children’s strengths and challenges and can plan individualized curricula before the children arrive in their classrooms.

According to the CASTL research, these are the two primary things teachers should do to improve preschoolers’ transition to kindergarten:

1. Use a wide array of transition practices, not just one or two. Children show better adjustment when teachers use multiple transition techniques. Just as you use a variety of teaching techniques to appeal to individual learning styles, using a variety of transition techniques ensures that you meet children’s unique needs. Individual children will be more responsive to some practices than to others.

2. Talk with the kindergarten teacher about the preschool and kindergarten curriculums and/or the abilities, interests, and needs of particular children. These targeted discussions support the children’s adjustment to kindergarten.

REFERENCES
My family helps me out

You can:

- Take me there and walk around with me.
- Point out my drop-off and pick-up point.
- Show me where my new classroom is and where the office, cafeteria, restroom and playground are.

I need to visit my new school ahead of time.

- Put me to bed and get me up at the new times, for two weeks before school starts.
- If needed, walk me to the bus stop and point out some landmarks for me.

I need to get used to my new school routine.

- Help me eat a balanced meal.
- Find out whether my new school serves breakfast.

I need a good breakfast before school.

- Show me where they are when we visit my new school.
- Go with me into public restrooms when we are away from home.

I need to feel secure and comfortable using the school restrooms.

- Help me memorize my full name, my address and phone number and your name or names.

I need to be able to identify myself.

- Talk with my teacher on a regular basis on how I’m doing.
- Attend parent meetings at my new school.
- Volunteer to help out at school activities.

I need your support at my new school.
# I am confident and prepared

You can:

- Let me know you are excited about me starting Kindergarten.
- Listen carefully to my thoughts and any concerns about my new school.
- Play a game like “you’re the teacher, ask me something,” to pretend I’m in school already.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I need to feel excited and comfortable about starting kindergarten.</th>
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<th>I need to know what Kindergarten routines will be like.</th>
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<tr>
<td>□ Teach me to follow directions by giving me simple steps for simple chores.</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Help me to learn how to share with other children, to wait my turn and to sit in a circle for a story with my friends.</td>
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<tr>
<th>I need to feel good about myself.</th>
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<tr>
<td>□ Be patient and let me develop at my own pace.</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Praise me for my strengths and little accomplishments.</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Pay attention to me and listen to my ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Help me feel good about all the things I can already do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Teach me that all my feelings are okay, but not all my actions are okay. For example, it’s okay to be upset, but it’s not okay to hit somebody.</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Teach me ways to calm myself down when I get frustrated.</td>
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<th>I need to learn to get along with others.</th>
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<tr>
<td>□ Show me ways to make new friends, by having some of my classmates over to play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Help me understand how I can be friends with children who are different from me.</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Teach me what to do when someone hurts my feelings.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>I need to know how to talk with others and to listen to them.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Talk with me about the things I’m already interested in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Teach me how to know when it’s my turn to speak and when I need to listen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Teach me words to describe my feelings and needs, and when to use them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Above all, please model the behavior, attitudes and values you would like to see me learn.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Read to me, every day

Books to help children ease into their kindergarten experience:

Do You Want to be My Friend?  
By Eric Carle

The Kissing Hand  
By Audrey Wood

Annabelle Swift, Kindergartner  
By A. Schwartz

Owen  
By Kevin Henkes

Will I Have a Friend?  
By Miriam Cohen

Starting School  
By Janet and Allen Ahlberg

Vera’s First Day of School  
By Vera Rosenberry

Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten  
By Joseph Slate

Look Out Kindergarten, Here I Come!  
By Nancy Carlson

Sheila Rae the Brave  
By Kevin Henkes
Please register your Kindergarten child before March to make sure your family receives information about all upcoming school activities!

If your child will be 5 by December 31 of this school year, and you are planning to have your child attend kindergarten, be sure to visit the school office or call the school to get more information on kindergarten registration.

**What's What at Our Elementary School?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Vice Principal</td>
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<tr>
<td>My Child's Kindergarten Teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent/PCNC Facilitator</td>
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**Meal Program Application**

Applications for free and reduced priced breakfast and lunch are available at the office. These forms ask for information about the parent/guardian’s income to determine eligibility for these programs.

**Required Documents for Entry to Hawaii Public School Kindergarten**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Form #</th>
<th>Other location to get forms</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Enrollment Form</td>
<td>SIS-10W</td>
<td>School (not available on internet)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth Certificate</td>
<td>If you do not have</td>
<td>Hawaii State Department of Health 1250 Punchbowl St., Honolulu, HI 96813</td>
<td>Hawaii State Department of Health Online <a href="http://www.state.hi.us/doh/records/birth.pdf">http://www.state.hi.us/doh/records/birth.pdf</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>TB Test</td>
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<td>Doctor's Office/Medical Center</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Health Record</td>
<td>RS 01-0531 Form 14</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Doctor's Office Hawaii Department of Education Online <a href="http://doc.k12.hi.us/forms/form14_StudentHealthRecord.pdf">http://doc.k12.hi.us/forms/form14_StudentHealthRecord.pdf</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proof of Residency</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hawaii Department of Education Online <a href="http://doc.k12.hi.us/residence_intro.htm">http://doc.k12.hi.us/residence_intro.htm</a></td>
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Good Beginnings Alliance, working in partnership with families, communities, policy makers, providers, and advocates
- Shapes public will and public policy
- Mobilizes action, and
- Maximizes resources
to ensure that all of Hawaiʻi’s young children are safe, healthy, and ready to succeed.

For more information please contact:

**Hawaiʻi State School Readiness Definition:**

“Children are ready to have successful learning experiences in school when there is a positive interaction among the child’s developmental characteristics, school practices, and family and community support.”

**Adopted by the 2002 Legislature, Act 13**

**Good Beginnings Alliance**
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Suite 200
Honolulu, Hawaiʻi 96813

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Toll-Free 1-866-531-5502
Fax 808-531-5702

gba@goodbeginnings.org

Please visit:
www.goodbeginnings.org
to view completed materials and learn more about our school readiness efforts.

- Hawaiʻi Island 808-887-1228
- Kauaʻi 808-632-2114
- Maui 808-270-5557
- Oʻahu 808-531-5502

**The Parent Line**
Monday - Friday
8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.
Saturday 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Oahu Neighbor Islands
526-1222 1-800-816-1222