Are You Ready to Roll?

Okay, so you’ve decided to enroll your little one in a program. Most likely, this is a first-time experience in a school-like setting for both you and your child. In this section we share some things you should keep in mind on how to prepare for that first day and beyond. It’s natural to be a little nervous until you’re comfortable with the surroundings and routine.

Before the Fun Begins

Here are a number of tips to help you get ready for the experiences ahead for you and your child.
#1 Ease Your Way In

**Key Point:**
Take the time to get your child comfortable and familiar with the new environment.

**Summary:**
Once you’ve selected a facility, visit a few times before your child officially starts. This allows you and your child to get comfortable with the new surroundings, the teachers and staff. This extra time taken before the actual start date will often ease the transition when your child sees you leave on the first day.

**Why this is Important:**
Children are often a little uneasy in new surroundings. Visiting a few times allows them to get use to the school. Your presence during a visit does two things: It allows your child to play and explore the new surroundings and, at the same time, still feel secure because they can look up and see you.

By stopping in the school, your child will be familiar with a few children in their class and feel more welcomed - and even feel comfortable enough to join in their play. This approach also gives you the chance to talk to the teachers while your child plays. When you feel more comfortable, your child will feel it and also begin to relax.

**Real-life Example:**
As is often the case, a parent came to visit our school because she was considering moving her child into a new program. As she explained, the director at the current school wasn’t warm and often seemed short tempered. She said there seemed to be a quick turnover in staff and she was looking for a more welcoming school.

During her time visiting with us, she asked several questions pertaining to the staff.

- How long had teachers in this classroom worked?
- Where did we work prior to this school?
- How much experience did we have teaching?

While visiting and asking questions this mom started to feel more comfortable. She then asked if she could bring her son for a visit. She brought her son in the next day for a quick 30-minute visit while all of the other kids were playing outside during “outside” time. She then visited on another day after “nap” time. And then finally, she and her son visited a third time during the early morning.

By visiting in the morning and late afternoon, mom was able to observe what was going on at those times and see how the classroom ran. After visiting three times with her son, mom was sure this school was a perfect fit for her son, as well as their family. This parent truly had her son’s best interest at heart and wanted him to be happy. When the day came that her son was to start, the transition was easy. He was eager to say goodbye and get involved with the other children.
### #2 Be in the Know

**Key Point:**
Each classroom typically has an area to post information for parents. Take the time to check the area to see if there is information pertinent to you and your child.

**Summary:**
This area often contains important information for the parents, staff, and even the state when they come to check up on the daycare. Plans for the day and the days to come are usually posted. If you have a question about something that is posted, you have access to teachers and staff right there and can address it with them immediately.

**Why this is important:**
One of the most frequent comments we hear from parents is, “Oh, I didn’t know.” Communication is essential to ensuring a great experience each day for your child. E-mail has its place, but is not always timely. You, or your designee, are dropping off and picking up a child each day and should be checking the bulletin boards or communication area to see if there is anything you need to know. For example, if tomorrow is “bring a stuffed animal to school day” and you don’t get the message, your child might be left out of the activity. No one wants that to happen.

**Real-life Example:**
So, what kind of helpful information can you find posted on those boards? Here are three good examples:

- A sign in sheet that lets the staff know who is attending that day. The state will check these sheets sometimes to assure proper child/teacher ratios.
- Lesson plans are posted so you can get an idea of what your child will be doing that week. It may also inform you of a special event or materials that need to be brought in for a project.
- There may be news regarding an illness going around that you need to be aware of.

### #3 Simply Ask

**Key Point:**
No question is silly. You don’t know what you don’t know. If you are unsure about something, don’t let it bother you. Feel free to ask.

**Summary:**
Remember, this is your first experience in a childcare setting. You are not yet familiar with how everything works. If you witness an activity you think is odd or if you are not familiar with it, inquire. As teachers, we just go about our day and things are second nature to us. We often forget that there are times when parents have no clue why certain things are done the way they are.

**Why this is important:**
Please don’t walk away wondering or worrying about an issue. We have witnessed parents become disgruntled over the way a behavioral issue is being handled with their children. Instead of addressing it with staff, they will vent to other parents and that often leads
Key Point:
Be an actor. Children sense how you feel through your actions and expressions. Act and move confidently and be positive before you leave for the day.

Summary:
Children have keen radar and how you react to a situation can have a major impact on how they will react too. Your child will be closely watching your facial expressions and actions and taking his/her cues from your behavior. Keep in mind that you want to leave your child with the impression that they will be safe and happy in your absence, and that YOU are confident in the decision to leave them there.

Why this is important:
Remember, you are setting the stage for your child's day. So whether it's your first childcare experience or you've been in it for a while, you need to establish a morning routine to make your child comfortable. And that routine includes being an actor and putting on a happy face even if you don't feel like it. Another way to avoid problems is to establish a routine that you use no matter how you feel. For example, enter the room to misunderstandings. If you don't feel comfortable talking to the teacher or staff, approach the director. And please don't think you're “burning any bridges” if you do this. Teachers and staff would rather you address the issue than not.

Real-life Example:
There was a little boy who said that his mom would yell at him for putting his coat on the floor before putting it on. What she didn't know is that is how he was being taught to put it on at school. Of course when we explained it she laughed. She thought her kid was just misbehaving and didn't think of asking us about it. It's really funny and kind of sad that as adults we are sometimes so afraid to ask questions. On one Parent Night, the parents were given cornstarch and water and asked to mix it together with their hands and make it smooth. It was quite a while later when someone piped up and said, “Why are we doing this anyway?” We explained that it builds great hand and finger strength, which leads to stronger small motor skills. The new things you learn if you just have the courage to ask.
with a warm hello and then check out the activities that are available. You may want to go over and get your child involved for a few minutes before stating, "It's time for me to go to work and I hope you have a fun day!" Some children like to sit with a teacher or stand in a doorway or window to wave. You don't want to show hesitation or keep going back as that can actually make your child feel like something is wrong. Always try to leave on a positive note.

Real-life Example:
We've witnessed parents get an angry face and say, “You better behave today or no TV when you go home. I don't want to hear all the bad things you did!”
Now what kind of tone did that set for the day? We know how hectic and aggravating mornings can be. There are days when the teachers don't want to smile either! However, we all need to be actors and set the right stage for our kids.

#5 Just Say So

Key Point:
Call or send a note to the teacher or staff whenever you have any questions or concerns. Open communication is one way to ensure your child's experience is positive throughout the year.

Summary:
You may find yourself wanting to discuss an issue with a teacher when you arrive to drop-off your child. However, because the teachers and staff are often in the middle of getting a bunch of kids ready for the day or engaged with other parents, you may find it difficult to actually get a moment with your child's teacher. This tends to happen as arrival and departure times are usually hectic periods in the day. A note or phone call may be your best option.

Why this is important:
Communication is the key to any relationship. Don't allow the circumstances of a typical day to circumvent your desire to have a conversation. If the morning or evening drop-off and pick-up times are not conducive to conversation, find an alternative approach.

Real-life Example:
We don't want you to worry. There are several options you can take. For one, you can ask the teacher if there is a time of day that would be more convenient to call or even come back for a chat. This is typically when the