

The Treehouse Nursery and Preschool Readiness

1. Walks independently up and down stairs
 - Some assistance needed is okay
2. Is able to say goodbye to parents without severe anxiety and stress
 - Has had play dates without parents in the past
 - Has experience with babysitters/family members
 - Has learned how to say “goodbye” and recover quickly from that separation
3. Napping
 - Is down to one nap a day, falling asleep around 12:30-1:30pm
 - Can fall asleep independent of a bottle or being nursed
4. Eating
 - Can sit independently at a child's table for a meal (let us know if they need a high chair at first)
 - Can feed themselves independently
 - Can drink out of an open cup

Ideas to help prepare for Treehouse:

- Start having play dates, babysitters and interacting in public setting: parks, children’s museum, library, music classes etc... to help with socialization and independence.
- Have your child sit in front of you when you read them a story or tell them an oral story, 2-3 min long.
- If child is not yet verbal, work on basic baby signs

On the next couple pages you will find one article from The Treehouse about Transitions and one article about Separation Anxiety. Please review both articles to see how you can further prepare yourself and your child for a wonderful start at The Treehouse!

Transitions

To better understand why transitions are sometimes challenging, we must look at them through the child's eyes. The better you understand them and the world they are living in, the better you will be capable of helping them with grace through transitions. Because parents and teachers are there to guide children and not to be dictators, these are very important (and sometimes hard) lessons for us 'grown ups' to learn.

A major reason trouble appears during a transition is simply because toddlers and preschoolers dislike change. "Change is often difficult for young children to manage. Children find comfort and security in what is familiar. Change can threaten their sense of security." As children are mainly '*present minded*' they simply have trouble letting go of the security of the *present* activity. The other main reason children show resistance to change is their strong *need* to assert their own wills. This is to develop autonomy – and is absolutely vital for their growth into independent, healthy beings!

Ways to help ease transition times:

- 1) Plan ahead. If transitions are disorganized, you are more likely to experience resistance.
- 2) Always give warnings. Abrupt transitions are hard for anyone. Think how much you love being interrupted when you are absorbed in something! Think of creative, engaging ways to give a warning. Music, a bell, a funny noise, turning off the lights, a special dance, a rhythmic clap can help.
- 3) Focus your attention on your child during the transition itself. If you are already prepared, you can better assist, and help them stay focused.
- 4) Be aware of your child's temperament. Some children like to move quickly from one thing to another. Others need to move slowly; making sure everything is 'wrapped' up in their current activity. Neither temperament is good or bad. They just are. Remember to respect that!
- 5) Give directions once and allow time for your child to respond. "Avoid rapid-fire repetition of direction. Rapid repetition invites oppositional behavior" If you need to repeat yourself, wait at least 10 seconds, and keep your voice firm, but calm.
- 6) Give choices, such as "where", "how" and "when"
Examples: Will you put your shoes on while sitting or standing? In your room, or by the door? Right now, or in 1 minute? Before your jacket, or after your jacket?

Your child is your mirror! They copy your movement, idioms, attitudes, intonation, speech and so much more. (Think of all the phrases they have picked up from you already!) A major way to assist your child in transitions is to show them how it's done. If you want them to respect and listen to you, then you must first show them those honors.

Source: Transitions and Other Troublesome Times by Clairece Feagin

Ways to help teach good listening skills:

- 1) Get down to their level. Eye contact is powerful!
- 2) Speak in a kind, calm voice that shows respect. They are your mirror... if you are stressed, whiny, angry; there is a good chance you may see that in return. Or they may respond with other coping skills by becoming hostile, withdrawing or 'spacing out'.
- 3) Use short, clear sentences.
- 4) Give directions closely to when they ought to be followed through. Advance notice is good, but don't give too many directions at once an hr. beforehand.
- 5) Set a good example for children to model: listen intently to them when they speak to you.

~~~~~

If you are stressed out or having a hard time communicating/getting a response be honest with your child, and work through it together. i.e "I am really upset right now, can you please help me by putting your shoes on", "I can see that we're both angry. Okay, lets stop and take a couple deep breaths together", "I am confused right now, can you tell me what your thinking/feeling/doing?", "How can I help you?"

The more emotional language you use the more emotional language your child will pick up. If they can learn to identify their feelings, they can more accurately work through them.

## “You say Goodbye, I say Hello” (Transitions continued)

Saying goodbye is hard for any person. So for kiddos at Treehouse saying goodbye to Mom and Dad in the morning may be just as hard as saying goodbye to Treehouse at the end of the day.

This is a compliment to both parties. It shows the love, trust and sheer enjoyment they possess for home and school.

As teachers and parents we can help ease these goodbyes with some creative ideas!

### 1) The Waving Window

On your way out the door pick a window (or make it a surprise as to what one you'll go to) to wave goodbye. This gives your child something to look forward to after saying the final 'physical' goodbye inside the house. Make it sneaky, funny, sweet... whatever fits your relationship!

### 2) The Kissing Hand (A wonderful book by Audrey Penn)

Place kisses on lips/cheeks/hands showing a way you will stay connected during the day. Touching the lips/cheeks/hands during the day gives them a way to feel your love.

### 3) Object Permanence

Around the time of 8 months your child developed the capability of understanding even though an object is hidden, it still exists. This milestone continues to develop over the course of years in a myriad of ways. i.e a two-year-old will still hide their face thinking they are out of sight. To help support this concept give your child something small they can have with them during the day. A paper heart that you made with them, a special painted rock or your picture, are some examples. At school from time to time if someone is missing Mommy we will show them their belly button. “That’s how you and Mom used to be connected!”

### 4) Story Time

Pick one or two books to read at the cozy corner. Pick a # of books and stick with it. This works well with puzzles too. Just remember to think about how long the book/puzzle will take.

*Source: Transitions and Other Troublesome Times by Clairece Feagin*

### 5) “Push” me out the door/ Shut the door behind me

Kids love to have this authority and ownership of your departure.

**Pick one of these ideas (or one of your own!) and be consistent. This will help your child know what to expect and will alleviate them trying to keep you longer.**

**Arriving at school before 8:45 is vital in a smooth transition. If you are trying to say goodbye as we are starting circle, it gets very clunky for everyone involved.**

**If you say “two more hugs and then I am going” follow through!**

**Your consistency will help give your child security and let them know what to expect.**

## Helping Preschoolers Cope with Separation Anxiety

The first day of a new preschool, or even the first day in a new classroom in the old preschool, can be met with a mix of excitement and anxiety for kids and parents alike. Although it's fun to embark on a new adventure and many preschoolers delight in the feeling of being "big," change can be scary for little ones (and their worried parents). While a highly orchestrated morning routine might get you and your little one out the door on time, that final goodbye can leave even the most upbeat preschooler in a puddle of tears. Preschool parking lots are packed with tearful parents afraid to put their cars in reverse for good reason: separation is hard.

It's only natural for kids to feel anxious when saying goodbye to their parents. In fact, separation anxiety is a normal part of child development. It can begin before the first birthday and pop up again (multiple times) until age four, and sometimes even into elementary school. It can even begin later in the school year. Some kids seem to be doing just fine with the transition only to experience separation anxiety a few weeks into the school year.

Crying, tantrums and clinginess are all common symptoms of preschoolers struggling with separation anxiety. Parents should also be on the lookout for signs of regressed behavior. Try not to worry too much if your recently potty trained preschooler suddenly fails to make it to the bathroom on time. When a child is challenged by a new developmental task, he is likely to temporarily lose ground in an area recently mastered.

As you prepare to drop your child off at preschool, try these strategies to help your child cope with separation anxiety:

**Confront parental ambivalence.** It's perfectly normal for parents to worry about the transition to a new preschool classroom. It's hard to trust a new person or a new school with a little one! Kids will pick up on parental ambivalence. If parents hesitate, kids will feel unsafe.

- Talk your feelings out with a friend who knows the drill to get some perspective.
- Plan a coffee date with a friend or your spouse immediately following drop off so that you have support.
- Get to know the school and teacher as much as possible in advance (talking to other parents involved in the school helps!) so that you feel comfortable with the environment.

**Start with a warm up.** Bring your child to visit the school a couple of times before the first day. Many preschools offer visiting days. Comforted by parental presence, your child will feel free to explore the classroom and check out the toys. This is also a great time to ask about the first day routine and chat with the teacher about the typical schedule.

**Create a goodbye ritual.** Creating a specific goodbye ritual prior to the first day of preschool can ease some of the anxiety about that final goodbye. Try one (or more) of these ideas:

- Develop a special handshake or special wave.
- Hug, kiss, high five and goodbye!
- Tuck a transitional object (i.e. a wishing stone, a small photo or a special charm) in your child's backpack and fill it with love before you drop your child each day.
- Love notes in the lunch box remind kids that mom and dad love them and will return soon.

**Send positive signals.** While it might be tempting to sneak out the moment your child is distracted, this can actually cause stress for your child later in the day. Acknowledge your child's feelings and normalize his worries. It's perfectly natural to feel a little bit scared, and a little bit of empathy can help your child feel safe and understood.

Watch your body language as you say goodbye. You might feel sad, but you want your child to feel safe and secure in this new fun environment. Stand up straight and smile for your little one to model a cheerful goodbye!

**Stick to a routine.** Children are at their best when they have plenty of rest, eat a nutritious breakfast and don't feel rushed.

- Prepack lunches and snacks the night before to save time in the morning.
- Wake up twenty minutes before your kids to factor in extra time for you.

- Have shoes, socks and backpacks waiting by the door at night.

**Read all about it.** Preschoolers love to read and there are several great books to help prepare kids for preschool. Anna Dewdney's [\*Llama Llama Misses Mama\*](#) and Audrey Penn's [\*The Kissing Hand\*](#) help ease the transition and normalize the process of separation for little ones.

The preschool years provide a great foundation for kids and kids have a lot of fun during this first school experience. Once you get over that first hurdle of saying goodbye, you will see your child grow and learn in leaps and bounds!

More resources:

- [Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood: Adjusting to Preschool](#)
- [Separation Anxiety: Letting Your Child Go](#)



Author:

Katie Hurley, LCSW, is a child and adolescent psychotherapist, parenting expert, and writer. She is the founder of “Girls Can!” empowerment groups for girls between ages 5-11. Hurley is the author of *No More Mean Girls* and *The Happy Kid Handbook*, and her work can be found in *The Washington Post*, *Psychology Today*, and *US News and World Report*.