

First Impressions Transition Policy

First Impressions is committed to developmentally appropriate practice. Children are especially susceptible to changes in routine, new environments and to separation from their parents or guardians. It is particularly difficult for children to be placed into the care of someone with whom they are not familiar. Therefore, we have developed a highly effective, developmentally appropriate plan for transitioning children into our center and, once they have entered our program, from one class to another.

Daily Transitions

One thing we must stress is that we do not trick children. In some care centers, parents wait for their children to become engaged and then sneak off to work, or parents say they're visiting the rest room or getting a snack and then run like rabbits through the parking lot. When parents vanish without saying goodbye, children feel betrayed and cheated. It makes them fearful. They cannot develop trust in our teachers because they're waiting for the moment that their parents run off. They can't relax and begin their day ready to learn and play.

At First Impressions, trust is everything. We encourage our parents to stay for a few minutes to settle their children. They are welcome to play together with whatever transitional activity the teacher has provided for the children, such as playdough, cars, puzzles or building materials. Many parents find it comforting to read a short book or two. Once the parent feels ready to leave, she is urged to tell her child that she's leaving, and that she (or dad, or a caregiver or grandparent) will be back later. The teachers are alert for that moment and stand nearby in case the child has trouble saying goodbye. Many children offer a kiss goodbye and turn to their friends to continue playing. Sometimes a child will become tearful and the parent needs to hand the child to the teacher, reassuring her that she'll be coming back later.

Some partings are especially tearful, and parents are always welcome to call anytime to see how their children are doing. Many children cry only until the family car is out of sight and then they settle down for some fun.

New Student Transitions

For new students, regardless of whether they're entering the toddler class or one of our older classes, the transition period generally takes several days. The length of time depends on the child's age and familiarity with child care. Children who have been in care since infancy may transition differently from children for whom this is their first child care experience.

First, the child's head teacher contacts the parents or guardians in order to break the ice and gather some information about the child. She asks questions about the child's current care arrangements, nap schedules, eating preferences, and any other information that may be pertinent. The head teacher also explains the transition process in detail and works out the transition schedule.

On the first day, the student arrives at First Impressions with his parent or guardian at around the same time he'll be coming in during a normal day. When they enter the class, the teachers greet them and invite the child to join the other children in their play while mom or dad sits down nearby and in sight of the child. This way, the child begins to explore his new environment and gets to know his new friends while his parent chats with the teachers. Children gain a great deal of comfort from knowing that their parents know the adults with whom they are being left. Seeing his parents interacting with his new teachers builds security, and having mom or dad stay during this first extended visit allows him to play without the stress of a separation. The parent and child are welcome to stay for as long as they like.

The next day, the parent leaves the child longer depending on how the transition is going. By this time, the child is thoroughly familiar with the routine and is ready to be a regular member of the class. Of course, all children are individuals. Some children transition very easily. Our staff is exceptionally skillful at comforting little ones who are having a hard time, and the children always come around. It may just take a few extra hugs and reassurance from both the parents and the staff that parents "always come back". We also have an extensive library of articles on the subject of separation that we're happy to share with parents.

Sometimes, it's the parents who are fearful. After all, they're leaving us with their most precious possession, and we are, after all, relative strangers. We encourage parents to develop good relationships with the teachers. Once the transition

period is over (parents who drop in during the transition period run the risk of confusing and upsetting the child when they leave), parents are welcome to stop in unannounced at any time, and they can call any time they like. We are committed to good communication because it helps develop trust.

Transition from the Class to Class

When it is time to move classrooms, incoming preschool children visit their class with their parents in the morning. Parents are asked to schedule just a little extra time in order to accommodate these visits. They don't have to visit long, but these morning visits give the children an opportunity to check out their new class, and their parents the opportunity to meet the preschool teachers. As the time draws closer, the new children are brought to the new classrooms during the day to visit during play time and snack time, and join the outside play on the "big" side. They learn the lay of the land, see the new toys available, and begin to develop relationships with the preschool teachers. On "Moving Up Day", the move becomes permanent. The new preschool children often like to start their days by saying "Hi" to the Toddler teachers, but for the most part, they commit quickly to their new status.

The outgoing preschoolers also learn from seeing the incoming children visit. They empathize with the little ones, show them around the class, tell them where the best toys are and help them if they need it. It's wonderful to see the outgoing children mentor the younger children as they become accustomed to their new class. Their being able to help empowers them and makes them feel proud and competent.

Transition From First Impressions to Kindergarten

Whether or not we're ready to see them go, sooner or later our preschoolers leave us to attend Kindergarten. Many of our children have been together since they were babies! Over the course of their time with us, they have grown in every way possible: emotionally, socially, physically and developmentally. They have made good friends and developed good problem-solving skills.

The most important part of our transition process from First Impressions to Kindergarten is our practice of allowing them to be preschoolers. Of course, we support them as they deal with the logistics of getting ready for the move to elementary school. We listen as they share the details of their 5-year physical exam – those shots are scary and they hurt! They tell us about their visit to the school for Kindergarten screening and how big the school is, and how many other kids were there, and whether they saw anyone they knew. We get calls and visits from Kindergarten teachers, and as the summer ends, we listen to parents about how excited the children are, how they're choosing school supplies and new school clothes. And we're thrilled for them! What a terrific new educational experience awaits them!

But we, as early childhood educators, remember two things: for children, transition can be scary, and children who are stressed do not transition well. So we have fun. Their last summer with us is the same as all the other summers. We play, we learn, we help, we read and are read to. We surround the children with love, and anyone who needs a hug gets one – or more! We provide a steady routine that continues First Impressions philosophy of developmentally appropriate practice. We do not focus on the future of Kindergarten, an unknown frontier for the children. We live in the now.

And at the end of the summer, we say goodbye. We turn our little ducks out of the nest and are secure in the knowledge that we have done everything we could to build good character, model good behavior and develop that lifelong love of learning that will carry them right through to college and the world of work and beyond. Research tells us that the first five years of a child's life are the most important for developing all those things that make a successful adult. We are honored to be entrusted with such an awesome responsibility.

In Closing

Our transition process is designed to build trust between the children, their teachers and their parents. Our focus on trust builds community. Everyone helps everyone in order to provide an environment where our children can relax, observe, learn, and grow. Our transitions work because we respect the children in our care and strive to empower them to make good decisions in a loving, warm atmosphere.