



## **Beginning School: Notes from a local school in Camas**

### **General Advice**

Keep in mind that young children's sense of time is starkly different from that of an adult. Children live in and understand the present moment. Future time is vague and enigmatic for children under six. Therefore, talking to them much about beginning school has the tendency to create anxiety about a place of which s/he knows little. If this is your first time putting your children in an environment in which you are not present, be aware of and attentive to your own concerns about taking this step. Young children tend to be quite proficient at picking up on any emotion in your voice or body language and so it is important that you address these concerns within yourself so that you can affect them positively with your calm, confident attitude.

The following are suggestions for indirect ways to prepare your child for beginning school:

Visit the school's playground before school begins. If you can't do this, visit a local elementary school on a Saturday or week night. Allow your child to experience the playground equipment there. Other than pointing out that this is a school playground, no explanation is necessary.

Select children's books from the library about kindergarten, preschool, making friends, etc. One example is *Frankie Goes to School*. You can ask your local librarian for other books on this subject.

Tell them stories about when you first went to school focusing on the positive experiences you remember. Make up stories about playground activities or going to school. Do not relate these stories to your child or to his future. These stories can give your child the information she needs without causing anxiety.

Begin to gradually readjust your child's bedtime and wake-up time a week ahead of the school starting date. Work towards a calm and orderly pace of being up, dressed, fed and ready to leave the house for a timely arrival at school. If this routine is mastered before the first day of school, your child will not need to deal with the stress of a new morning routine.

### **Clothing**

Dr. Montessori said that the clothing of children “. . .Should meet the requirements of simplicity facilitation freedom of movement, while it should be so made as to enable children to dress themselves.” Pay attention to the fasteners on the clothing so that they are ones that your child can handle such as snaps or large buttons and they are easy to pull down and up in order to use the bathroom. Also, if you are quite invested in a particular item of clothing staying clean, it is



probably best to leave that clothing for another occasion and have your child wear clothing that is easily washed.

### **Transitional Items**

Transitional items are toys, pacifiers, blankets, books, clothing (we once had a child bring a potty chair!) that your child may want to take into the classroom with them when they leave you. We ask that you keep these with you as it is important that your child's hands be free to manipulate materials of interest and that their mouth be free for speaking. Also, during the week before school begins, if you start weaning your child from those items when they go on outings, leaving them behind when they enter the classroom will be that much easier. That said, if it is too traumatic for your child to part with these items on the first day, allow them to come into the classroom with them rather than engaging in a power struggle with them. Each teacher may have a special container which these items go into at the beginning of the day and from which the child can retrieve them when they are ready to go home.

### **Short Good-Byes**

Short good-byes and a positive, non-worried manner convey to the child an unspoken message that you know s/he is being left in a safe place you picked out just for them. Parents set the pace for a child's success at school. It is also helpful if you have your child walk to the classroom rather than carry them to the door. A short, cheerful good-bye from you can help your child feel there is nothing to be concerned about. If your child is hesitant or begins to cry, continue on your way. We know this can be hard, but our experience is that lingering only prolongs or aggravates the transition. Give your child a hug or kiss goodbye and then leave as quickly as you can. If after leaving the building you are experiencing anxiety about your child, you can call on the phone after 5 or 10 minutes and the teacher will let you know how your child is doing. Usually, the goodbye is the hardest and once the parent is out of sight, the child can be directed to something of interest in the classroom.

### **The First Weeks**

Beginning school is tiring for young children. They form new relationships, adjust to new surroundings and experience new procedures and lessons. Be sure your child has adequate rest and appropriate quality time spent with you.

Reluctance to go to school may sometimes manifest itself the first weeks of school. School can be a challenge for children and due to lack of experience, they have not mastered their analyzing skills. The child may experience a growth spurt physically, intellectually or socially. They may be anticipating a future event which causes some anxiety for a child under six.

If a child is having difficulty adapting within a short time, the guide will contact you. We are equally anxious for your child's adjustment and will put forth every effort towards your child's



comfort. If home complaints continue to worry you, please send written messages to the guide about your concerns or call the office and leave a message for the guide to call you. The guide will contact you soon.

Common complaints reported by parents during adjustment and transition times:

“I don’t feel well.”

“No one plays with me.”

“I’m too tired.”

Please accept these and other remarks as a sign of growth in your child. S/he is beginning to develop the ability to express feelings. Children are just not always able to accurately identify the cause.

Enjoy and celebrate your family’s transition to the school years. The Montessori environment is a rich and interesting place for your child. The consistency offered by returning to the same classroom each fall helps you observe the confident growth and increasingly peaceful transitions your child is capable of as s/he matures.