

Stepping into Kindergarten

A Guide to Parents and Prospective Kindergarten Students

Starting school is a big step for your child and your whole family. It's a wonderful and exciting experience, but it also means a big change for you and your child.

We want to help you get off to a good start by giving you and your child information that will help you prepare. This booklet gives you:

- an overview of the kindergarten program
- suggestions for ways to help your child get ready for school expectations and routines
- information about how children learn and develop
- activities to help make the most of those important learning opportunities at home

This booklet is also a "fun project" for your child. There are places in this booklet for your child to draw and contribute. There are parts you can do together. During the next five months, as you and your child do these activities together, you can talk about how your child feels about starting school and what your child can expect in kindergarten. These activities will help your child feel confident and excited about starting school.



Learning and growing in the "Kinder-garden"

The word kindergarten comes from German and literally means "children's garden." It's a place where your child will grow and learn. Here are some of the things you can expect in your child's kindergarten class.

Stimulating learning environment

The kindergarten classroom reflects the program. It is alive with activity centers, artwork, toys, learning spaces, creative materials, books, letters and words, dress-up clothes, art supplies, calendars, child-size furniture, blocks, puzzles, games, paper, pencils, erasers and much more. Many classrooms have computers, plants, and listening-learning centers.



Variety of learning activities

Kindergarten teachers plan many learning activities during the full day program. Every day, the teacher

will spend time with the class as a whole group, doing direct teaching. She will also spend time with students in small groups and one-to-one. Every day, the teacher will read stories, and the whole class will sing songs and learn rhymes, chants or poetry. Children will work on their own and in groups. They will learn through play. Virtually every day there will be outdoor and indoor physical activity.



Active learning

In kindergarten, children learn best through active experience. Children learn through exploration and discovery. Teachers combine subject areas to create learning opportunities that resemble real life - for example, playing store as a way of learning letters, numbers and social skills. There are times when children are expected to

sit quietly and listen, but most of the time, kindergarten classes are filled with sound and activity.



Appreciation for diversity

Every child is different. In the average kindergarten class, each child is at a slightly different developmental stage.

Children come from various racial and cultural backgrounds. They may speak different languages. They have different learning styles. These differences are respected and celebrated. The kindergarten teacher designs a program with each child's unique learning needs in mind.



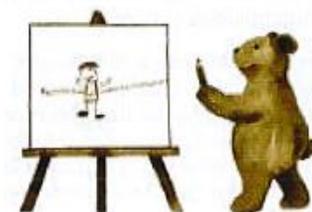
What do children think?

We asked some children who are now in kindergarten: "Before you started kindergarten, what did you think it would be like?" Here are some of their answers:

- fun
- it's not home
- hard work

Ask your child

What idea does your child have about going to kindergarten? Write down some of his/her answers. Ask him/her to draw a picture of what they think kindergarten will be like.



First steps-preparing for Kindergarten

How ready is my child for school? That's a question many parents ask. Generally, any child who is excited and enthusiastic about learning is well-equipped to do well in kindergarten.

Think about how much your child has learned already. Before ever starting school, your child has mastered some of the most important lessons of life. He/she knows the difference between themselves and others, between family and strangers. He/she grasps the connection between cause and effect. He/she has a developing sense of time—of past, present and future. He/she understands and can express spatial relationships—up from down, in from out, front from back. He/she can use the grammar of her language and has a large vocabulary of words.

These are tremendous achievements, and you were the teacher who helped your child accomplish them.

Your child will build on these skills during the early years of school.

However, there are additional skills and knowledge you can help your child acquire during the next five months that will ease the transition from home to school. They are listed on the next page in the form of a game you and your child can play. As your child takes each step in the game, provide a small reward - a stamp or sticker to indicate that step has been mastered and perhaps a small prize at the end.



Listening-it's not as easy as it sounds

When we asked five and six-year-olds about kindergarten - what it was like, what children need to know, what they learn in school - the single biggest issue that they mentioned was *listening*.



Listening is a complex skill. Help your child to understand and practice the steps involved in listening:

- Stop what you are doing.
- Look at the person who is speaking.
- Don't talk or move around when the person is speaking.
- Think about what the person is saying.

Dress for (Kindergarten) success

When you're shopping for school clothes for your child, here are some tips to choosing the ideal wardrobe for "power learning."

- In the course of an average kindergarten class, your child will sit on the floor, jump, run, walk, bounce, stretch, crouch, bend, and sit in a chair. Choose clothes and footwear that will be comfortable during all of these activities.
- Choose clothes, jackets, shoes and boots that are easy to put on, take off and fasten.
- Kindergarten children learn best when they are exploring, discovering, experimenting - in other words, getting messy. Choose clothes that are durable and easy to clean.
- Outdoor play is an important part of the kindergarten program. Your child needs outdoor clothing for all types of weather.



The getting-ready-for-school game

Each of the bear's paw prints tells you something you should know how to do before you start kindergarten. You can put a stamp or sticker on each paw print when you have finished that step. When you've completed all the steps, you'll be ready to start school!

	Tell your first and last name.
	Tell your telephone number and your address.
	Tell the first and last name of each of your parents.
	Know the way to school if you will be walking to school, or the way to the bus stop if you are taking the bus.
	Print your name. (It's okay for your mom or dad to print your name for you on the top of a piece of paper and you copy it underneath.)
	Tidy up your toys when you're finished playing.
	Clear your own dishes from the table.
	Go to the bathroom, flush the toilet and wash your hands by yourself.
	Put on your shoes and tie your shoe laces. (Tip for parents: help your child learn to tie shoes by letting him/her sit on your legs and tie your shoe laces.)
	Take off your sweater or jacket by yourself. Then put it back on, even if it's inside out. Zip or button it up.
	Listen quietly while someone reads you a story or poem.

Play is the way! How Kindergarten children learn

Children learn best when they are having fun. Playing, experimenting, doing things, taking on different roles, imagining, pretending - these are all important learning techniques. Play continues to be important in the early grades and really, throughout school and life.



For this reason, play is also an important part of the kindergarten program. When children are playing in the kindergarten class, they aren't taking a break from learning, and the teacher isn't taking a break from teaching. Through play, children learn academic skills such as reading, writing, math and science. They also learn problem-solving and creative thinking. And they learn essential social skills.

Of course, kindergarten classes also have learning activities that you may think are more typical of school. Teachers do direct teaching with the whole class, such as identifying letters of the alphabet and their sounds, demonstrating numbers and illustrating science facts. Together, the class looks at the calendar every day as a way of learning about concepts such as days of the week, seasons, weather and special occasions. Students spend time putting pencil to paper - printing letters, words and numbers.

At this age, play is an important way of learning for your child. As he/she plays, he/she learns about the world and how it works, about other people, and about themselves.

We asked - "What do you like about Kindergarten?"

- We have fun playing games.
- We make up good ideas for pictures and stories.
- Like playing in the sand.
- We listen to fun stories and poems.
- We talk and sing.

Play is your child's homework

Watch your child at play - your observations will give you insights into how they prefer to learn. All play - in fact, anything your child is doing - can be a learning experience. Here are some ideas to help you make the most of those opportunities during the next months as you prepare for the start of school.

Reading and writing

Make your own alphabet book. Let your child decorate each page with drawings and cut-out pictures. Read the book together.

Play "Go Fish." Put letters of the alphabet that your child knows on inexpensive playing cards. After shuffling, give seven cards to each player. Take turns asking each other for cards - for example, "Do you have a 'c'?" Each time you make a pair, discard it. When this game gets too easy for your child, use words instead of letters.

Make sandpaper letters. Have your child run their hands over the letters. Add a challenge by having them touch the letter while their eyes are closed to guess which one it is.



We asked - "What do children need to know before they come to Kindergarten?"

Here are what some children said:

- how to be quiet and listen
- how to sit still
- how to tidy up
- how to share
- how to be nice to others
- how to spell "cat"

Have your child "write" their own shopping list when you make out yours. Ask your child to "read" their list to you. When you go shopping, let your child find suitable items from their list.

Make a salt tray by pouring a thick layer of cornmeal or sand into a big roasting pan. Your child can print letters with their finger in the pan.

Math

Play a guessing game. Put buttons or jelly beans in a small jar. Have everyone in the family guess how many items are in the jar, then count them and give a prize to the winner.



Play bingo and dominoes.

Play "store." Put price tags on toys (under 20 cents) and let your child use pennies, nickels and dimes to pay for them. Then switch places - let your child be the shop keeper and "make change."

Create a picture telephone book with your child. Put a picture of the people your child phones regularly (grandparents, friends) on a piece of paper with their phone number. Your child can use a toy phone to "call" when it's not possible to really telephone them.

Science

Let your child help you follow a recipe to cook something. Measuring is math, cooking or baking is chemistry, and eating the end product is nutritious.

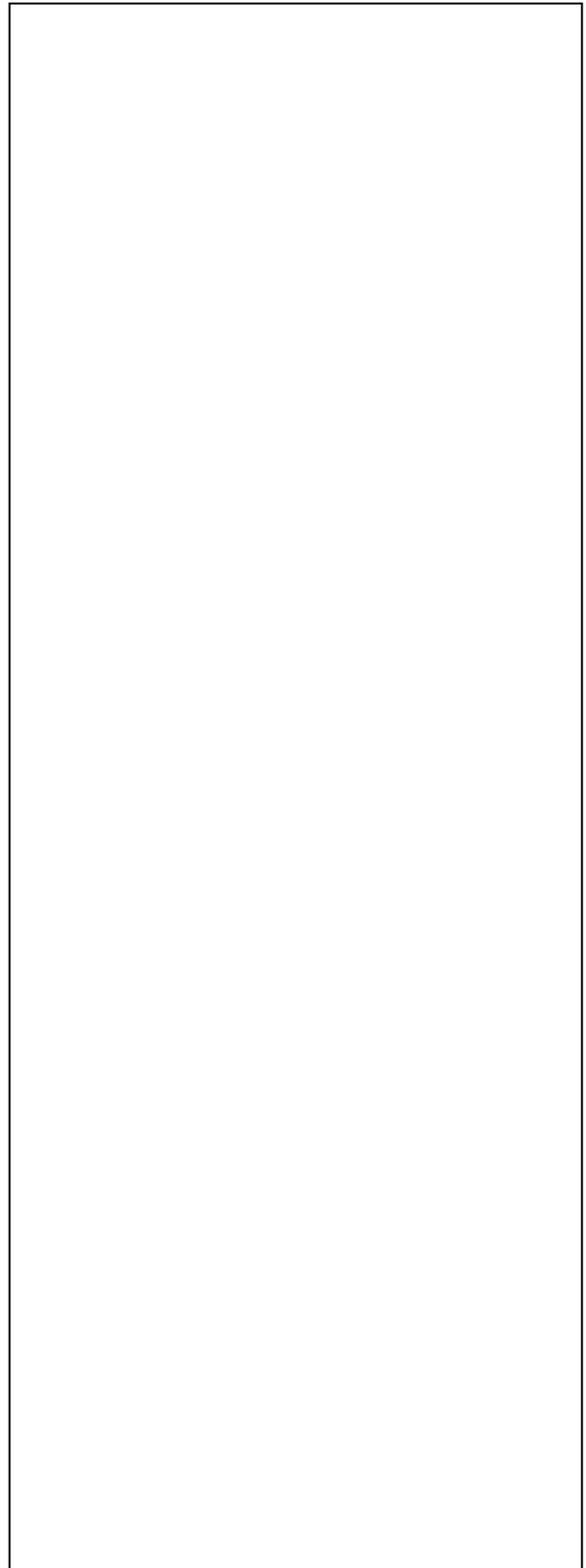


Measure the rain. Use a plastic jar with straight sides and a flat bottom and a marker. On the outside, mark "half full" and "full". Keep track of the amount of rainfall.

Give your child a magnifying glass to inspect things up close - bugs, leaves, fabrics or anything they are interested in. Then your child can draw pictures of what he/she sees and keep them in a "science journal."

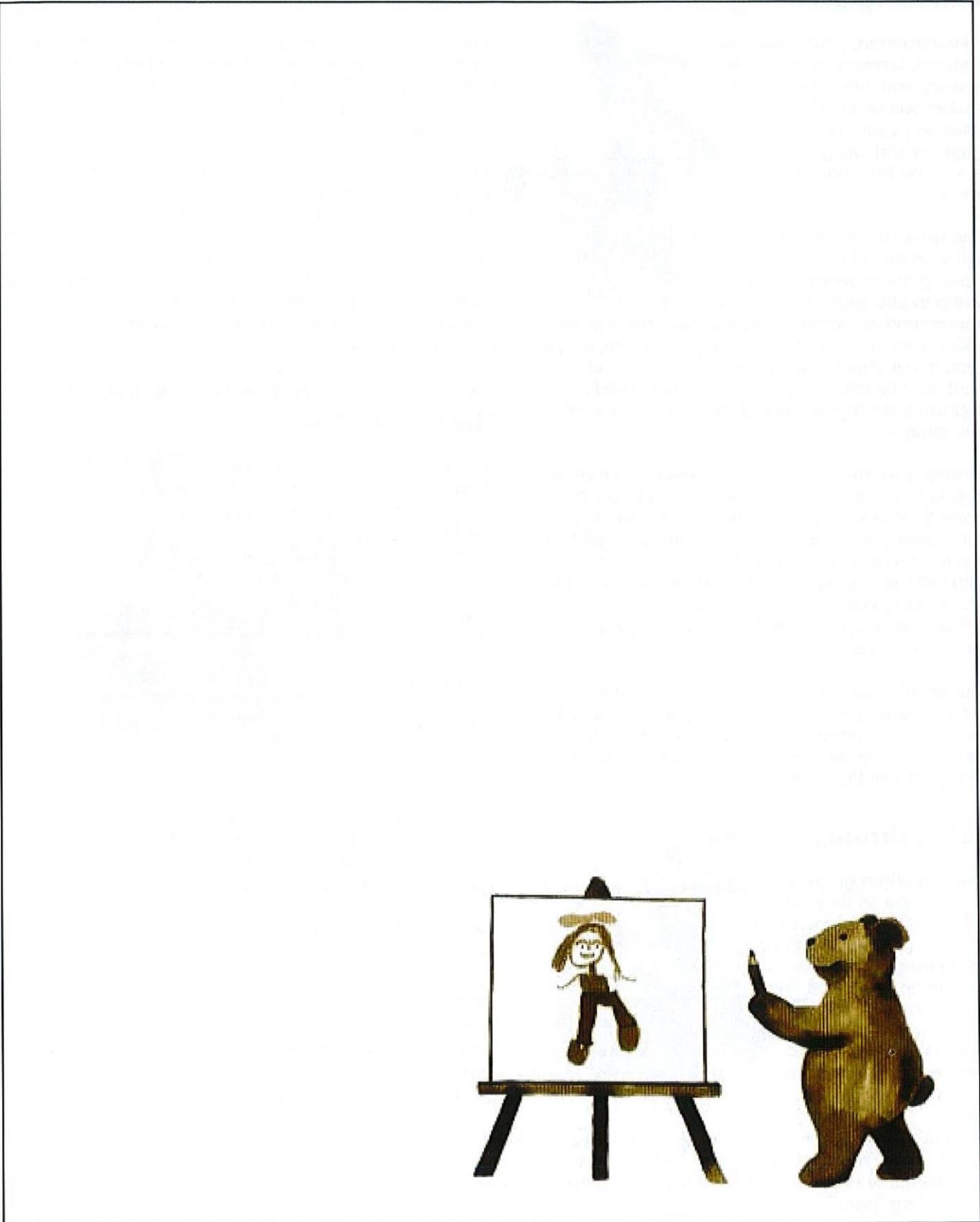
Let your child become a bathtub scientist. Give him/her different objects - ask your child to predict which will float and which will sink, then test the predictions. A plastic container and measuring cups will allow him to practice measuring. He/she can learn about suction from eye droppers and plastic syringes. An egg whisk will propel a toy boat along the water - helping your child to learn about propulsion and force.

Ask your child "to draw a picture of where your food goes inside you after you swallow."



Next time you're at the library, get a book about the human body and look at it together.

"Write" a story together. Have your child dictate a story to you. He can illustrate the story. Read the story to your child. Encourage her to read it to you.



Step by step - Measuring your child's progress in Kindergarten

In kindergarten, your child will receive three report cards throughout the year. Your child's teacher will be continuously assessing your child's progress and will give you reports on how he/she is doing.



How does the teacher assess how well your child is learning and meeting the provincial kindergarten expectations? The most important method is through observation - watching and talking with your child. Every day, for example, your teacher will observe students' language development, and he/she will assess what each child's responses tell him/her about that child's knowledge of language.

Another important way teachers measure students' progress over the whole school year is through "portfolios" - a showcase for best work. The teacher works with your child to select examples of all types of school work that represent their best work. Your child will have to explain why they picked each sample. As you, your child and the teacher review the portfolio over a period of time, it will be easy to see the progress your child has made.

Your child's teacher will also use many other strategies to assess your child's learning such as small tasks and assignments. Each strategy gives the teacher another part of the picture about how and what your child is learning.

Going through stages

Young children go through many stages as they grow and learn. One of the things your child's teacher will be considering as they do an assessment is your child's stage of development. That's important information to help plan a learning program suited to your child's needs.



Each child develops in his/her own way. Some areas develop more quickly than others. But here are some things we know about what stage children are at in kindergarten.

Children see the world differently from adults. Teachers need to find out each child's level of mental maturity and make sure the learning program meets the students where they are.

Since children's thinking at this age is closely tied to concrete objects and experience, they learn best by doing. Telling is not teaching. Teachers help kindergarten children to learn from their own personal experiences.

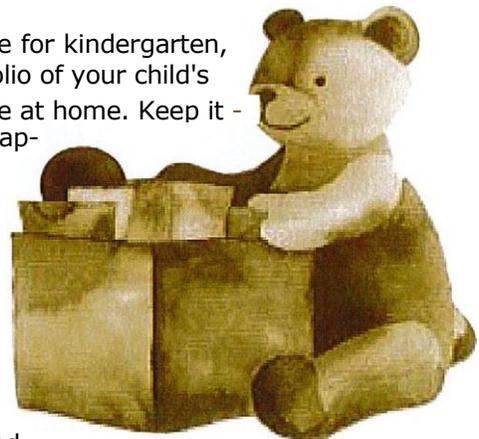
Since children develop mentally through a series of stages, they need time to learn and grow. It's not a race - speed of development isn't important.

Since children learn from their direct experience in the here and now, the most important goal of kindergarten is to nurture their development. We place most emphasis on experiences that reward curiosity, thought and imagination.

Record your child's best work in a

As you prepare for kindergarten, create a portfolio of your child's best work done at home. Keep it - in a box or scrap-book.

Here are some ideas about what you might include, but it's limited only by your imagination and that of your child:



"home portfolio"

- drawing and paintings, along with a sentence or two in which your child describes the picture and why it's an example of "best work"
- a copy of "writing" you child has done - you can "translate" what it says
- a story your child has dictated to you
- a sample of your child's attempt at printing their name
- a calendar page of your child's weekly tasks that were done well
- a photograph of something your child planted or made
- a list of your child's favorite stories

Give yourself an autograph.

Print your child's name in this space, then let your child practice copying it.



Learning styles

Your child's learning style is one of the factors the teacher will assess during the kindergarten year. Watch your child for clues about how he/she learns best. Share your observations with your child's teacher - your insights will help the teacher understand your child's learning needs.



If your child is always active, for example, as many children are, they will find it hard to learn while sitting still. Here are some learning ideas that involve the entire body:

- have your child draw and scribble on giant sheets of paper, using thick markers or large paint-brushes
- "write" with a flashlight in a dark room
- draw letters, numbers and pictures in the sand

- make letters from bread dough, macaroni, yarn, clay, toothpicks, straws, twigs, wire
- after you read your child a story, act it out
- draw a number line on the sidewalk or driveway and have your child count, add and subtract by moving along the number line
- have your child use different parts of his/her body to measure things - how many "feet" long is your kitchen? How many "arms" long?

We asked - "What do you learn in Kindergarten?"

- how to read
- to pick a different toy each day
- how to add and subtract the numbers, as far as we can
- we learn about 2D and 3D shapes
- how to make pictures with many things
- to tidy up
- to work out problems with friends
- how to have fun

Making the first day great

Do you remember your first day of school? Were you excited? Frightened? Sad?

Your childhood memories about starting school and the feelings those memories bring back will influence how you feel about your child starting school.



You may also have mixed feelings about the start of school - excitement for your child on one hand, a sense of loss on the other. You may be worried about how your child will cope with new routines and strangers.

Your child may also have some mixed feelings. He/she may feel worried that the teacher won't know their name or that they won't know the children in the class. But, most likely your child also views the start of school and the new independence as an adventure and a challenge, especially if they feel prepared and know what to expect.

Your attitude toward the start of school can help set a positive tone. If you do feel anxious or worried, try not to pass those feelings along to your child.

Here are some ways you can help your child have a good experience during the first few days of school.

Before the first day

In the weeks leading up to school, practice walking to school or to the bus stop often, so it begins to feel like a familiar routine. If your child will be riding the bus, attend the bus orientation and go over the bus safety rules a few times.



Get everything ready a day or two in advance.

A few days before school starts, begin getting your child and yourself used to the bedtime and wake-up schedule that will be required during school.

The day before, let your child pick out what he/she is going to wear on the first day of school. Let him/her choose a favorite outfit from clothes that are already "broken-in" and comfortable.

Try to get your child - and yourself - off to bed a bit early so you're both well rested in the morning.

The first day

Get yourself and your child up early enough to eat a calm, unhurried breakfast. And keep things as normal as possible. If your child normally has cereal for breakfast, make cereal this morning.



When you say good-bye to your child on the first day, make it quick, light and reassuring.

Your child will be reassured by a warm hug and a reminder that you, or the usual caregiver, will be picking them up or waiting at home after school is finished. **Try not to communicate your feelings of anxiety and separation.**

Many parents feel a temporary sense of loss when their children go off to school. If you're feeling that way, plan a special activity for yourself that you can look forward to during the first days of school.

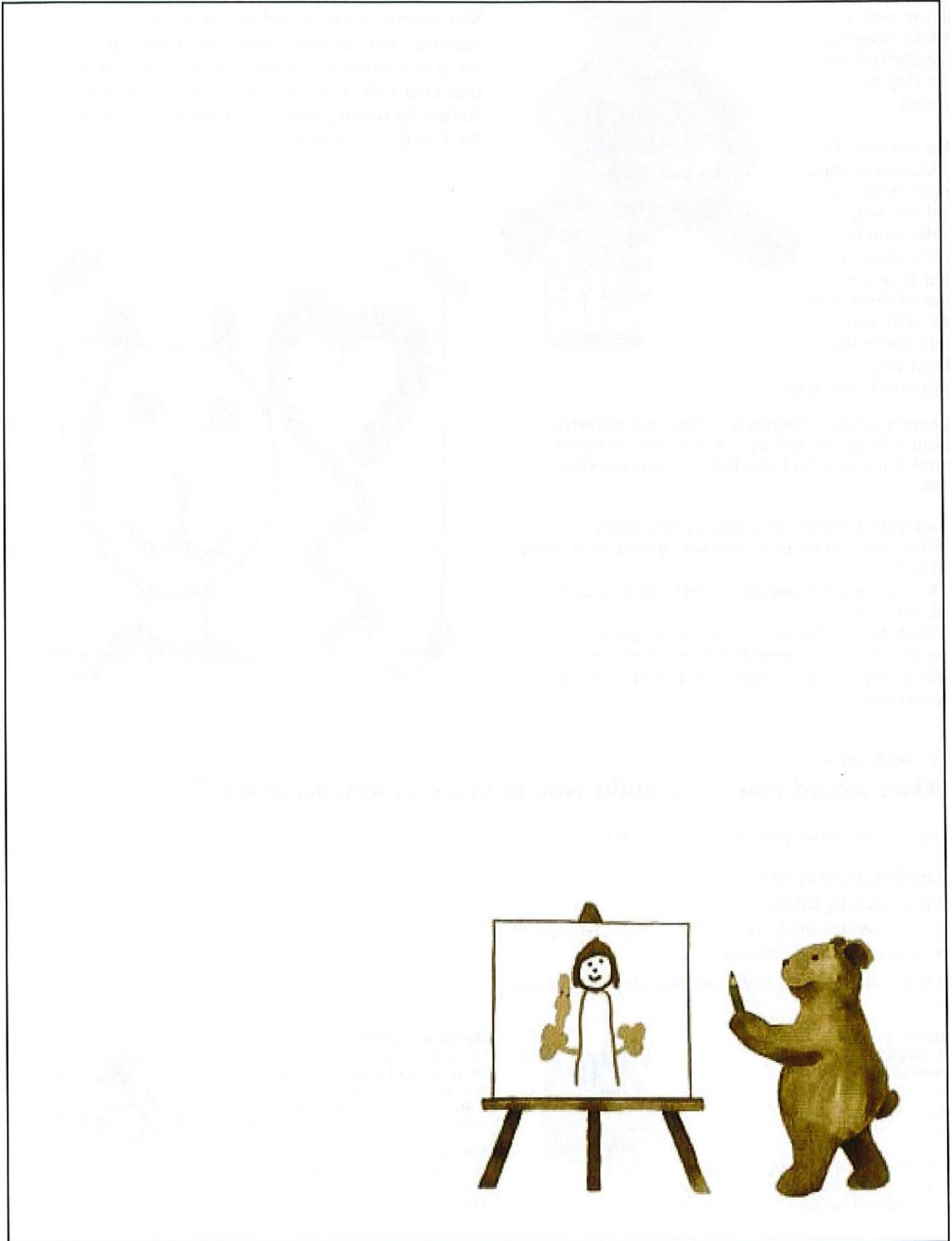
In kindergarten, we share. We share everything.



Everything I need to know I learned in kindergarten.

Robert

Ask your child to "draw a picture of your teacher on the first day of school."



After school

Plan a special dinner with your child's favorites to celebrate the first day of school.

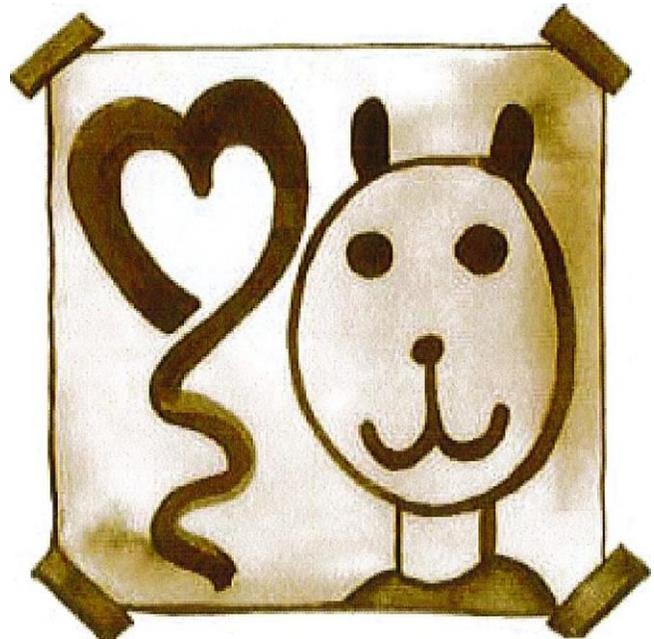
Use the first day of school to start some routines that will help make sure the whole school year is great. One of these is to talk with your child every day about what happened at school.

Because young children are often not talkative about school when they are at home, here are some questions that can help to start the discussion.

- Did your teacher read you a story today?
- What did you do in school today that you really liked?
- Did you make a special friend? What is special about them?
- What do you like best about your teacher or about one of our friends in your classroom?
- What are you most looking forward to doing tomorrow?



Another good routine to get started on the first day of school is displaying your child's school work. After you have looked at it and talked about it with him, display it on the fridge. Or create a "gallery" - one or more inexpensive bulletin boards hung in a hallway at child's eye level on which to tack your child's school work. Get the art gallery started by having your child draw a picture about the first day of school.



We asked - "What would you tell a child who is starting kindergarten?"

Here is what some current students said:

- Kindergarten is fun.
- You have to listen.
- You have to work, but there's lots of playtime too.
- You'll make new friends.
- There are blocks, toys, books, and lots to do.



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