

Families Engaging in the Transition to Kindergarten

[Music]

Jesse: I am most definitely excited for my little one to go to kindergarten, and I know she's definitely ready and prepared.

Narrator: We experience transitions every day. Some transitions are smaller, like moving from one activity to another. Others maybe bigger, like changing schools or jobs. Learning to transition from one thing to another is a valuable skill for young children to have and can make a difference in school success. One of the most important transitions is going to kindergarten. Families and Head Start staff play critical roles in the transition to kindergarten. Research has shown that when parents are actively involved in their children's transitions, children are happier and more self-confident when they get to kindergarten, and that can help them become better learners. The transition to kindergarten can cause mixed emotions for everyone involved.

Child: I will miss teachers.

Edwin Garcia-Prieto: I plan a visit to the Seattle Public School kindergarten, so my former students get to see me at least once in a while. And they will feel like, "Oh, you haven't forgotten about me. You're still around."

Narrator: We might experience joy, confusion, excitement, pride, fear of the unknown, and stress. Families and Head Start staff may share in the excitement of new opportunities and reflect together about the progress the children have made. Children may proudly declare ...

Sam: I'm going to kindergarten!

Melanie: I'm going to kindergarten.

Narrator: Families may feel sad as they prepare to leave the program staff they have grown to trust and love. They may feel unsure about what to expect with the transition to kindergarten. Some families may wonder how to manage their own work schedule with their child's new one. It may feel unpredictable.

Trey: Obviously, I've been through kindergarten; my wife has been through kindergarten, so we, in general, know what it's going to be like. But still, that transition from preschool to kindergarten when it's your own child is a bit of a different story.

Whitney: There was also for us a lot of fear coming from a program where there was a lot of diversity and a lot of kids that looked like my child to a school where he was the only child of color in his class.

Rocio: I am nervous about kindergarten, because I don't know what that's going to look like.

Narrator: Parents may wonder about what their role will be in the new school. They may worry about making connections with the staff and other families.

Tanya: Great, I have to start all over again. I have to meet new therapists, new IEP therapists, kind of build my relationship—my family all over again.

Narrator: There are effective practices that help to bridge the path from Head Start to kindergarten, and can make a difference in how parents, families, and staff feel about the transition. Families and staff can work together to share information, build relationships, and align across settings. Parents can share information about their child's strengths, interests, and goals. This may encourage families to continue to be advocates for their children throughout their education.

Jesse: So, whatever school they go to, I am an advocate for my child.

Rocio: At the beginning of the school year, we met and we talked about his strengths, his weaknesses, and then what I do at home in order to help him. And then, we do conferences, and the teachers tell me what they're working on, and then I tell them what I'm working on and what I would like ... My goals are for him.

Narrator: Families can help plan for kindergarten information events by sharing their interests and concerns.

Educator: You guys can write down the question on this paper. We're going to look for the information, and then we'll provide it to you in the Kindergarten Cafe, if not sooner, through your teacher.

Parent: OK. Perfect.

Trey: Getting, you know, after-school transportation, or worrying about before school, absolutely played into a lot of the stresses we had going into it, just understanding, well, what time does the school actually open up? When is drop off? I think after school is going to present a whole different set of circumstances, because you knew there was going to be at least a couple of hours that your child needed to be cared for.

Narrator: Staff can provide the information and community resources that families want.

Alejandra: The fact that there are Spanish-speaking staff makes us feel very comfortable and very trusting in the information we have. They always ask us, "Do you want the information in Spanish or English?"

Narrator: Families and Head Start program staff can build relationships that are respectful, positive, and trusting. These relationships can set the foundation for families to feel comfortable engaging with their child's new school.

Whitney: I don't know that we had a lot of that feeling of automatic trust going into kindergarten, so that's kind of where we started out the school year. I think we have a lot of trust now with his teacher, and just the way that she's speaking about him now during conferences, the things that she sees in him are the same things that we see in him. So, she sees, you know, that he's sweet, and he's enthusiastic, and he's very smart. And so, she sees our child the way we see our child, too.

Narrator: Head Start programs, receiving elementary schools, and out-of-school time programs can provide joint activities for families and children. These activities can promote positive relationships across settings.

Jesse: Extra activities after, or even before school, I love being able to be involved with those.

Sana: In the lunch room, all the parents come here. The teachers from kindergarten and some principals from elementary school, they come here, they tell parents what needs to be expected and what they're going to do, how they're going to learn. And they give the packets to the parents, which school they are going into, so we don't get confused on where my child is going.

Trey: I was very skeptical about going in, but found to be very effective were actually these kindergarten hangouts. So, one of the things our elementary school did was have different kindergarten events actually at the school, at the playground, which gave the kindergarteners the opportunity to play with their own peers, and then for us as parents to be able to socialize with other kindergarten parents. And it starts to build some of those networks. And really seeing how Samuel took to those experiences and not only meeting with these other kids, but getting the familiarity and the comfortability of being in his own school, playing on his own playground, really helped him feel more comfortable and know that yeah, this is going to be my school. I know what's going on, and it's not such a scary thing.

Narrator: Family practices can be embraced within the classroom. This alignment between home and school nurtures an understanding of the family's values and cultures, and may help to sustain home languages.

Tanya: It's also really important for me, for my children, to still know their home language. It's English in the morning, and then the last three hours is Spanish. It's kind of like a dual language immersion program.

Hani: It's amazing when you find people that respect your culture, they respect your opinion.

Narrator: Head Start programs, receiving elementary schools, and out-of-school time programs can align routines and expectations. Aligning across settings can provide stability and continuity for the children and families.

Trey: The preschool program did a really good job of helping us connect with our kindergarten counterparts and set us up for what—really what we could start to expect. And I think a lot of the structure that we had Samuel experience in preschool, with a bit of how the classes were and how the general day-to-day operations were, there were a lot more overlaps between preschool and kindergarten. A lot of the skills that a kindergartener would need luckily he's already been developing in preschool.

Narrator: When families team with Head Start program staff to share information, build relationships, and encourage alignment between settings, everyone is better prepared for the transition to kindergarten.

Hani: It's about them, the kid. You want to see this kid graduate. You want to see this kid to have a life and independent. You want to picture all that. This is the path.

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