

Kindergarten Prep: The Stuff No One Told You

Hello Wildflower Parents and Guardians,

As many of you are about to embark on this new journey called Kindergarten, there are so many things you are doing to prepare yourself and your child. From school supply shopping, picking out the first day of school outfits, and paperwork; there are many things that will happen over the coming weeks to get ready. However, there are some things that are not written in any manual or on any back to school list. Our profession as early childhood educators has provided us with years of experience regarding kindergarten transitions, including emotional changes, behavioral differences, and separation challenges.

The first thing is the emotional highs and lows. Typically we see emotional changes start about 6 weeks prior to kindergarten. It is normal to question why they are upset, overly active, etc. Oftentimes the children themselves do not know why they are experiencing highs and lows in their emotions. It is in our experience that this is just one of the ways they express themselves and the unknowns that are to come. At Wildflower Early Learning Center, we have open discussions, story times, and 1:1 lessons on what it means to go to kindergarten. We incorporate our 3 rules (taking care of self, each other, and the environment) into these conversations. We allow children to talk about the positive and negative things they are feeling regarding change, big schools, new friends, etc. We take the time to celebrate each child as an individual and give them private and public opportunities to share.

Next are behavioral changes. Your child may show lack of interest in going to school/daycare. They may try to prolong their time at home in the mornings and see if staying home is an option. This is a normal occurrence and it's important for parents and teachers to support routine and emphasize the importance of daycare/preschool/school. It is also normal for children to show changes in their sleep patterns. They may try to stay up later than usual, may begin to omit their nap or begin napping (if they've weaned off of them already), and may be sleeping in longer. Not only are their minds processing, their bodies are often experiencing growth at this time as well. Children may also show more signs of illness or complaints of pain such as tummy and headaches. All of these are normal reactions as they work to identify and react to their feelings.

During this time before kindergarten begins, separation challenges are common as well. This not only happens at school but at home, at grandparents, and at friends' houses. Children can show new signs of "shyness" or may talk less with those persons that they are familiar with. Some children may show difficulty with drop offs as well. As children near their graduation, it is great practice to remind them of what drop offs will be like at the bus stop or the school pick up line. The team is happy to support and encourage continued independence with this as well.

As they process the place of safety and the people that they have spent that last 1-3 years with, they are going to experience many cycles of feelings. Those can range from sadness and grief, to excitement and nervousness, and many more. Being a source of comfort, letting them know that we are there for them, and allowing them the opportunity to express themselves (being in words or actions) are just a few of the ways in which we can help them through this big change.

As we transition from kindergarten preparations, it's also important to note things to expect in the first weeks and months regarding feelings, moods and behaviors. Children, as resilient as they are, will be tired the first weeks. It is different stimulation, different environments and a new routine (both at home and at school). This can be especially prevalent on the days in which they have extra activities such as swimming or sports. Along with tiredness, their appetites can show changes. They may eat more or less at dinner depending on how and when they eat lunch at kindergarten. Our advice is to pack or provide a filling and healthy snack for after school, as this can help curb extra emotional and physical reactions.

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Again, their bodies are adjusting to a new routine and it's the little steps that make the jobs of parents easier. It is also important to be aware of over communication or under-communication. The common question of "what did you do today" may be overwhelming for the child as they often need a period of transition between school and home. A few suggestions to help open the lines of communication include: "tell me who you sat by at lunch?", "how did you make yourself proud today, what specialist did you have?", etc.. Do not worry if your child isn't sharing much in the early days or if they share every detail. They will learn to communicate and value school as the days and years go on.

Lastly, remember to give yourself grace, allow yourself to express your feelings and talk to your child about what your adult brain is going through. They learn through the adults around them and it helps to normalize feelings and show healthy ways to express oneself.

Thank you for allowing us to be a part of their early learning journey and we can't wait to see the amazing things they achieve as they start their elementary school adventures.

With love and appreciation,

The Wildflower Early Learning Center Team