



Bridget Mawhinney
(School Counsellor, SD#71)

Tara Ryan
(District Outreach
Counsellor, SD #71)

Counsellors' Corner

Preparing Your Child/Student For Starting Kindergarten

Rationale:

Change can evoke many emotions in children and their families. The transition to kindergarten, is, for some, an exciting time and for others, can be a time of worry. For some children, it is their first time in a structured environment and for others, it is a shift from Day Care or Preschool. In this newsletter, we would like to share perspectives on what is happening for your child as well as specific strategies and guidance as we navigate this time of learning and growth.

What's Happening for the Student:

- Increased dependence/need to be on a screen to settle; difficulties with patience/resilience.
- Growing independence with daily tasks or increased clinginess and anxious behaviours as change is sensed.
- Increased ability to communicate using words.
- A natural desire to be in control of their world and do it themselves!
- Sleep patterns may change.
- Pressures regarding toilet training and independence with daily tasks
- Nap time schedules – some 4- and 5-year-olds still require naps.
- Navigating the emotional tone of the home.
- Parent concerns regarding their child's ability to be self-sufficient at school: communicate their needs, eat their snack/lunches on their own, recognize bathroom cues, demonstrate independence with daily tasks, focus, ability to sit, interact with others, share, follow directions and tolerate frustration.

Strategies For Parents

- Stay connected.
- Play with your child.
- Familiarize your child to playing with other children; perhaps connecting with children of the same ages and playing at the school playground.
- Be realistic regarding amount of time a child can tolerate playing with others. For a child who does not have other siblings, slowly build their capacity to play with others. Start with one friend at a playdate and build from there.
- Supervise playdates and coach social interactions.
- Observe behavioural changes, ask yourself what feelings or thoughts are behind these behaviours.
- Consider reading Mona Delahooke's book, Brain-Body Parenting or check out her website www.monadelahook.com for helpful information on how to understand behaviours.

- Anticipate kindergarten with curiosity rather than excitement (it may be exciting for the parent – not so much for the child 😊).
- Attend **Welcome to Kindergarten** at your local school. Meet the new teacher, visit the playground on weekends and in the summer. Help your child become familiar with the school grounds.
- If your child has any issues that you feel the school may need to know, eg. speech, anxiety, trauma, behaviours, changing family dynamics; inform the principal or counsellor.
- Monitor your child's use of technology. Reduce screen time (phones, tablets, TV) to one hour a day or less. The introduction to kindergarten is difficult for those children who have access to screens beyond an hour each day.
- Help your child learn to self-soothe
- Monitor the content of the games/shows your young child is watching; specifically, if they have older siblings. Refer to www.common sense media.org.
- Practice skills such as putting on shoes, coats, doing up zippers, opening and closing containers for their lunches, drinking out of water bottles, and carrying their own back packs. Build independence as much as possible. Don't expect perfection as our kiddos are only 4 or 5 years old. It's a learning journey. (Tip: glue a long shoestring to a 1x4. Have your child practice tying this shoestring over the summer).
- If your child has a difficult time separating, avoid the common mistakes. Resist the temptation to stay until your child is "okay" – this tends to make a child stuck in an anxious state and draws out the nervous feelings (akin to peeling a stuck band aid off slowly). Demonstrate confidence and trust that your little one is in a safe place and that they have the resilience needed to be successful at this.
- Build a goodbye script and practice it over the summer. Let your child have a say and draw it out like a map (e.g. "How many hugs/kisses will you need? What do you need mommy/daddy to say when I leave? Where will we say goodbye?" The more predictable something is, the less anxiety provoking it is. Avoid peeking in the window and looking over your shoulder as you leave. These send the message, "You might not be okay, so I need to keep checking.")
- Practice the script over the summer and don't deviate from it in an anxious moment (e.g. If your child begs for another hug/kiss, remind them that you are sticking with the script and won't deviate from it – that way, they will trust that you will do what you say and come back when you say.) Make the goodbye solely about your child and save visiting/chatting with others for outside so your child doesn't feel like they are being short-changed with the goodbye and have to act up to get your attention.
- If you need to speak to your child's teacher, communicate via email, phone or make an appointment. Don't discuss concerns in front of your child.

Strategies For Student

- Play, play, play – we learn so much through play!
- Build with Lego, create stories using playmobile or stuffies. Ask your child what will happen next?
- Build forts
- Colour, practice drawing pictures, write letters or numbers.
- Practice writing your name. If a pencil is too hard to hold, put uncooked rice in a pan, trace the letters with your fingers.

- Play with plasticine, strengthening your hand muscles.
- Practice holding and cutting paper.
- Use magnetic letters on the fridge or a cookie sheet. Build your name.
- Sing the ABCs
- Count to 10
- Sing songs in the car at home.
- Practice rhyming words.
- Practice being in a car without a screen. Look out the window, what do you see? Choose a colour and count the (blue)cars, count the trucks, look for dogs in the back of trucks!
- Go to the grocery store. Practice waiting in the lineup. Yes, it's boring, what can we do to learn how to tolerate boring. Acknowledge the feeling and make a game to tolerate the feeling. Look for letters, colours, numbers in the store, make up a game that you can play while waiting. Your creative mind kicks in when you are feeling bored!

Strategies For Teacher

- Separation anxiety is about a fear of the unknown. Predictability, routine, and repetition of the group plan provides safety and security for a new student. For students who need extra encouragement, have the school counsellor help the family develop a routine that begins at home (pics of routine can help). At school, script out the goodbye plan and encourage parents to model confidence. Work with your school counsellor to develop a support plan with District Outreach if a child isn't settling by the end of week 2.
- Belonging is key. Young kindergarteners know that they belong at home, at grandma's, etc. They may resist school because they don't feel as though they belong. With belonging comes confidence, security, and risk-taking with learning and social connections. Assist your students in developing this confidence with the language you use, "Welcome to our **safe** space this morning. You are appreciated and I am so glad you are here – kindergarten just isn't the same without you!"
- Consider sensory issues with each child. Are they sensory seekers or avoiders? Refer to our previous newsletter at <https://learn71.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Behaviour-and-Sensory-Needs.pdf>

Practical suggestions....

Instead of saying...	Try....
Don't be nervous, there's no need to worry.	I think most people worry when they try something new. We'll take it slow and figure it out as we go.
You are such a big boy/girl now!	Nothing changes about who you are – you're just going to spend some time meeting new friends and learning new things.
You must be so excited!	So, you'll be in kindergarten soon, how are you feeling about that? What are you looking forward to? What do you hope will happen? What do you think your favourite part will be? What do you think might be tricky for you?
If you have a hard time, I will come get you early, just have the school call me.	I trust that you will be okay because these teachers really care about you. I will see you at 2:30 and I can't wait to hear about your day.

I will stay until you calm down.	Have a routine and stick to it. There is safety and confidence in the predictable.
Sneaking out when they are distracted	Stick to the script and the plan. Stand your ground and be confident, despite any pleading or tears.
Thinking you are on your own as a parent in this	Reach out and ask for help! Counsellors make themselves available for kindergarten transition support and your child's teachers want to know when there is a struggle so we can be supportive and proactive.



Tara and Bridget

Tara Ryan, B.Ed., M.Ed., R.C.C.

Bridget Mawhinney, B.SpEd., M.Ed.