



# Comfort Play & Teach

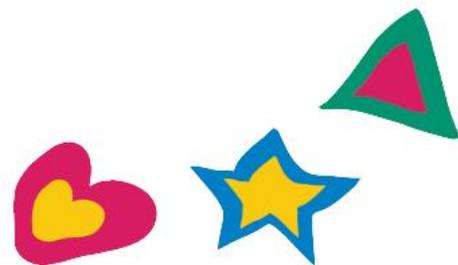


## When Your Child Attends Day Care for the First Time

Is your child attending day care for the first time? Parents will experience many different feelings about this important stage of their child's growth and development. There will also be many adjustments to make as routines and schedules are adapted to this new situation. This is an exciting time for families and Invest in Kids has prepared a survival guide which we hope will support parents and their children as they cope with these changes and provide useful ideas and information that will help them along the way.

### In this Survival Guide, parents will find:

- Tip sheets on how to find child care options best suited to your child's needs.
- Information about recognizing and choosing quality day care or home day care.
- Ideas that will help parents to manage their time, prepare quick and nutritious meals, and make the most of the time they have for interacting with their child.





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**Q:** *What should a parent look for when choosing child care or kindergarten?*

**A:** When looking for a child care or school setting that is just right for your child, allow enough time to compare many, to have all your questions answered and to meet the educators who will teach and care for your child. The time your child spends in these learning and care environments should be Comfort, Play & Teach® time. Be sure that the centre or school you choose makes both you and your child happy!

## Comfort

- Look at the learning environment. Does it have **comfortable** and **organized spaces** for children to play, explore and interact? Are there soft furnishings and natural materials? Do the windows let in enough light? A learning environment should be interesting and inviting, and **should make your child feel at home**.
- Make sure that the standards that **ensure your child's health and safety are being met**. Is the centre or school clean? Are the learning materials in good repair and safe? Are the children receiving proper meals or snacks that are nutritious? If you have concerns about issues that affect your child's well-being, find out how to have them addressed. Parents have a vital role in ensuring that children receive quality education and care.

## Play

- Notice the kinds of activities available to the children in the classroom. Do the choices include math, language, science and nature, building toys, blocks, art, music and a drama area? Is there time for children to explore freely, pursue their own interests and to learn through play? Posted lesson plans should match what is being implemented, but there must also be **flexibility to follow the children's lead!**
- Inspect the playground and outdoor learning materials. Are materials like the climber and riding toys in good repair? Are there grass and trees that provide shade? Do children get sufficient time to practice their physical skills including running, climbing, riding and playing collaborative games? Children need a healthy balance between active outdoor play and more quiet indoor activities.



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## Teach

- **Ask about the centre's or school's educational philosophy.** Is it play-oriented or more academic in nature? Is there a balance between learning experiences that are initiated by the children and directed by teachers? Do teachers provide individualized attention and does the philosophy complement your child's learning style? It is important to know that your child will be exposed to a variety of learning opportunities, while exploring individual interests at her own pace.
- Remember, a good classroom environment, curriculum and educator all have important roles in providing care and learning to the whole child. If your child is excited by what is available in the classroom, is safe, and most importantly, feels cherished and valued by the teachers, you should feel confident that your child will flourish there and that you have made the right choice!

## The Home Child Care Option

For parents who are looking for an alternative to enrolling their child at a daycare centre, home care may provide a good option. This kind of care is provided in a caregiver's home and is available for infants, toddlers, pre-school and school-aged children.

Caregivers are screened, approved and monitored by home visitors, who work for home care agencies. **Below are some of the advantages of selecting home daycare:**

- The agency provides assistance, support and monitoring, and aids care providers in planning developmentally appropriate activities, preparing nutritious meals, maintaining a safe environment and selecting safe and suitable toys and equipment for children.
- Children will enjoy a warm and homey environment, which they may find comforting and reassuring.
- Children receive consistent care and attention from the child care provider.
- There are fewer children than in day care. This ensures that children have opportunities for playing and interacting with others but still receive lots of individualized attention.



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- Home care may be a less expensive option than day care.
- Parents may be able to find a home care situation that is conveniently located near to their own home or to their workplace.

When considering the options for child care, **look for the following signs of quality**, to feel satisfied that your child is receiving the best possible care:

- Does this care provider have a good **reputation**? Speak to other parents who are receiving care there and ask them to share their stories with you.
- What are the care provider's **policies** (e.g., about pick up and drop off time, illness, or spontaneous visits from parents)?
- What kind of learning materials and **curriculum** are available? Are toys age appropriate and in good condition? Is there a good balance between indoor and outdoor play? Are there excursions (e.g., to parks or museums)? Find out what happens in this care situation to ensure that your child is stimulated and having sufficient opportunities to learn.
- Is the **environment** clean and safe? What happens if there is an emergency? Are hazardous materials out of reach? Has the house been childproofed? Is there adequate heat, light and ventilation? Take time to look around and make sure that the environment meets safety standards



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## **Q:** *How do I prepare my child for childcare?*

**A:** Starting childcare can be an adjustment for the entire family. Routines will be new for everyone and some family members will adjust easier than others. Whether it's a family home care setting or centre-based care, here are some tips to help make the transition easier for everyone.

### **1. Start talking about the new routine well in advance of the first day.**

For instance, if mom will be doing the drop off, she could start talking about the ride to childcare. Talk to your child about the new routine that will take place once in care. Familiarize yourself and your child with the names of the teachers as well as the other children.

### **2. Arrange advance visits.**

Advance visits, for children of all ages, allow your child to become familiar with the caregiver, the routine, and the other children. Visits can begin several weeks before the first day.

### **3. Ease your child in and out.**

At the start, a parent or other family member should visit with the child for 30 minutes to two hours. Over the next few weeks, arrange to leave your child for a period of time without you. This will help the caregiver and child get to know each other. It will also show your child that you will come back. During the first full week, you may want to pick up your child a little earlier on the first day, gradually increasing the length of stay as the week progresses.

### **4. Make introductions to the new children.**

Getting to know the other children and the other parents will be important for you and your child. During visits, be sure to introduce your child to children in his or her group. Similarly, don't hesitate to introduce yourself to some of the other parents.

### **5. Take touches of comfort.**

Allow your child to take something that will give her comfort—a special toy, blanket, even a picture of you.



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## 6. Make a comfort call.

Talk to your caregiver to agree on a time you can call during the day. It's important to plan this together to ensure your call won't take the caregiver's attention away from the children at a busy time.

## 7. Touch base with your caregiver every day.

Exchange information about your child's day or evening at home. For instance, if your child had a restless night it is important your caregiver know so she can respond to any unusual behaviours or needs that may arise as a result. Similarly, as you head into the evening, you should know if your child was fussy at childcare.

## 8. Talk with your child.

Each day, talk with your child about special things that happened at childcare.

## 9. Have an older sibling visit.

If there's an older sibling in the same childcare setting, ask that she be given the opportunity to visit her younger brother during the day during the adjustment period.

## 10. Be specific about pick-ups.

Reassure your child that you will be back. Make sure he knows who will pick him up at the end of the day and when. Even if he is not old enough to really tell time, one of the ways children learn to tell time is when pick-up routines become established.



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**Q:** *Childcare and School: How can I help my child adjust to a new daycare or school?*

**A:** Here are several ways to help your child adjust to a new daycare or school:

- **Let your child know that you realize change isn't easy** and that you know it takes time to adjust to new places, people and things.
- **Be supportive and encouraging**, not impatient or frustrated.
- **Explore the new area, new daycare, or school with your child in advance** of going there on the first day.
- **Along with your child, get involved with new groups and activities** at daycare or school. This will help you feel more connected to your child's new situation, too.
- **Help your child find the playgroups and activities** she has always liked doing, and try to get her involved, outside of daycare or school.
- **Where possible, allow your child to stay connected** with friends from his old daycare or school.
- **Ask your child what you can do to help** – children often have great ideas about how you can help them feel better.

**It would be a mistake to let your child stay home from a new daycare or school just because he is afraid and doesn't want to go.** Likewise don't force your child to get involved in outside activities too soon - he'll let you know when he is ready. Try not to say things like, "We moved three months ago - aren't you over it yet?" That will just make your child feel worse.

If you find that your child is sad, withdrawn, angry, acting out, doing unusually poorly in the new daycare or school, or showing physical symptoms of anxiety and things don't seem to be getting better even long after the move, consult your child's daycare provider or school teacher to see if they are noticing the same behaviour, and then consult your child's physician.



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## Time Management Tips for Busy Parents

Once attending school or child care becomes part of a family's routine, there are many things parents can do to balance their time between work and home, to make morning transitions easier, to save time on meal preparation and to create time for relaxing and playing. Below are some ways for parents to make the most out of their time and for maintaining balance in their lives.

### Choosing Child Care

- If you are able to do so, selecting a child care centre that is near to where you work can help families to manage their time. Rather than coping with the stress of rushing across town to pick your child up after work, you can spend time talking to your child, finding out about his day and sharing stories about your own as you drive home together.
- Another alternative is to consider an in-home child care provider (e.g., a nanny) who will take over for you once you leave for work. This can help to make your morning routines more relaxed, encourage you and your child to enjoy each other's company. Knowing your child is in the care of someone you trust will help you to feel free of worry once you are at work.

### Implementing a Morning Routine

- Establish a morning routine which involves doing particular things (such as eating breakfast) at the same time each day, and do routine things in the same order. This can save lots of time, and can also help you to remember to do important things, like bring permission letters to day care or kindergarten.
- Create a special corner for needed child care or kindergarten items. Have a bag or knapsack ready that holds everything you need (e.g., extra clothes, sleep toy) and check it regularly to replenish any items. Having needed materials prepared ahead of time will save the effort of looking for them at the last moment.



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## Making Time to Relax and Play

- Parents can reduce their own stress by sometimes saying “no” when they really do not have time or feel up to doing something. It is alright to make relaxing a priority and to keep special time open strictly for the purpose of doing a fun activity that is just for you.
- Ensure that your child gets sufficient time to enjoy unstructured play time where they can explore their own interests, play creatively and just day dream. While it is important for children to have educational experiences, it is equally important that they have the freedom to just play.

## Menu Planning and Meal Preparation

- Set aside time to look through cookbooks and plan weekly menus. If your shelves are well stocked with basic ingredients, this will facilitate meal preparation. When cooking, make extra portions that you can freeze and reheat later on. Consider time saving kitchen tools such as a slow cooker and microwave oven.
- Make arrangements with friends or neighbours to share the cost of groceries and each prepare extra portions of things such as chili, spaghetti sauce or casseroles that can be enjoyed by both your families. This is a nice way to develop friendships, in addition to saving time and adding exciting new recipes to your dinner menu.
- Consider shopping for groceries on-line as a way of saving some time. You can make your selections at your convenience and then the groceries will be delivered to your door. Some examples of this service include:  
<http://www.e-zgrocer.com/> and <http://www.grocerygateway.com/> .
- Explore services that prepare meals for you according to your specifications. You simply tell them what you need and then retrieve the prepared food later. Some sites to look into include: <http://www.letsmakeameal.ca/> and <http://www.dinnerready.com/canada/NowInCanada.aspx> .
- There are many cookbooks with quick and nutritious recipes and many websites with tempting recipes as well. Try the a simple search for “Quick and Healthy Meals” or “Meals for Busy Families” and see what you can find.



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**Q:** *Mornings: How can I make them more pleasant for my child?*

**A:** Here are several strategies that may help make your mornings a little easier on everyone:

- **It's important to allow enough time in the morning** so that you don't have to rush, even if it means getting up a bit earlier than you already do. This will allow you to stay calm and avoid acting stressed around your child.
- **Create a workable schedule and explain it to your child**, so she knows what to expect in the morning. For example, let your child know she has to get up, get dressed, eat breakfast and leave the house by 7:30 am. It's also a good idea to keep this routine as regular as possible.
- **Build in a little time for your child to play** and give her the feeling she can come back to the game later.
- Try to **lay out clothes, prepare lunches and pack up anything else that goes with your child the night before**.
- **Try to incorporate some FUN into your morning rituals** by singing songs, and just getting a little silly together. If your child seems tired, reassure him, but explain that he still has to get ready. And as frustrated as you might get, never yell at or physically hurt your child. Lastly, when you drop your child off, let him know that you're not angry with him and make it clear that you are coming back.



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## How Parents Can Take Care of Their Own Needs When Their Child Begins Day Care

When your child starts day care or school for the first time, as parents you may experience a range of feelings, such as happiness, pride and even anxiety. You will naturally want your child to fit in, to be stimulated and to feel good about his new environment and teachers. Adjusting to the new routine may be stressful, and place unexpected demands on the family for a while. How do parents deal with all of these changes? Here are some suggestions for helping parents to address their feelings and to cope with all that comes with this new transition.

- Do what you can to prepare your child for starting day care or kindergarten (e.g., talk about the experience, read books together, visit the new classroom, or meet the teacher). This will help your child to feel more positive about the experience. Knowing that your child feels ready will help you to feel more comfortable and confident when your child spends her first day at day care or school.
- Try to prepare for changes that will arise once your child begins to attend day care or kindergarten. How is your routine going to change and how might this go more smoothly? Are there younger siblings who will miss having a constant playmate and who will now want to spend more time with you? Explore different strategies for managing your time and for adapting to the new situation.
- Find ways to cope with stress that may accompany changes to family schedules and routines, or that result from work demands. Are there family members or friends who can provide you with help and support? Do you plan for regularly taking a bit of time out for yourself? It is important to make sure that that your own needs are met, so that you will feel more able to meet your family's needs.
- Take time to establish a relationship with your child's teacher and feel welcome to contact the day care or school with any questions or concerns you may have. You will feel reassured by regular communication about your child's progress. Finding a way to participate (e.g., by visiting the classroom) will give you the opportunity to observe your child and know that her needs are being met.
- Remember that the transition into day care or kindergarten is a process that takes time. This process will be affected as you and your child develop relationships with the teacher, and your child learns to interact with his peers. By communicating your own needs and observations about your child, you are helping the teacher to support all you do to help your child to feel successful.
- Know that it is alright to communicate your needs and feelings, and to seek help with the job of caring for your child and encouraging him to learn. Every day you are facing new challenges and your life constantly changes as your child grows. Child care providers and teachers can be a source of support for you, and hearing from parents lets them know how to be more helpful to children and families.