READY FOR PRESCHOOL

— PARENT GUIDE

What Really Matters Before the First Day



A play-based parent guide to building confidence, independence, communication, and everyday classroom skills.

Dr. Michelle Peterson

Educator • School Leader • Preschool Founder

SPARK EDUCATION

2026

WELCOME / HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

For the child in front of you.



A play-based guide for parents and caregivers preparing a child for preschool, primarily ages three to five.

Read for a useful decision

Begin with the question that matters to your family today. Each chapter explores an ordinary moment, the demands behind it and a response you can adapt. Readiness is considered alongside the help and opportunities adults provide.

Examples give you something concrete to think with. Use words your child understands and the communication methods they already use. Discuss an unfamiliar support or a concern with the people who know your child.

Return to a chapter when the situation changes. One useful adjustment can be enough to try before you decide what is needed next.

Use the pages your way

The contents and chapter-opening links help you move around the PDF. Small numbered notes link to sources at the back; complete web addresses are printed there for use on paper.

Print on US Letter paper at actual size / 100%. Select only the pages you need. The goodbye plan is designed for handwriting. A separate Printable Toolkit contains additional planning forms.

The scenes and conversations are illustrative examples, not accounts of individual families. This guide offers education rather than an individual assessment, diagnosis or treatment plan. Confirm school-specific arrangements with your program.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

© 2026 Dr. Michelle Peterson | Spark Education. Based on the original guide by Dr. Michelle Peterson. Custom vector illustrations created with AI assistance. Sources checked October 2026. Links may change.

USE AND SHARING

One purchase covers one household or one educator and their enrolled classroom families. You may print or privately share these PDFs with those families. Other educators need their own licenses. Do not resell, publicly post, or redistribute outside that group.

READINESS / SEEING THE WHOLE CHILD

What readiness really looks like.

Look at how your child participates in an ordinary day, and at the support that makes participation possible.

A child can name every letter and still need help opening lunch. Another may say little in an unfamiliar room, then explain an elaborate game at home. Neither glimpse tells you everything you need to know about starting preschool.

Head Start describes readiness as a shared responsibility: children develop skills, families support learning, and schools prepare to welcome children. Physical, social, emotional and thinking skills all belong in that picture.[5]

For your family, the useful question is specific: what part of the school day could become more manageable with a little preparation? Start there. An entrance checklist cannot tell you all the ways your child learns.



An everyday activity reveals the task, the materials and the help around a child.

What would help your child take part more comfortably?

Readiness 04
Independence 07
Bathroom 11
Sources 61

A CONFIDENT BEGINNING

Goodbye is a skill, too.

A thoughtful handoff helps your child get to know the person who will care for them while you are away.

AT THE DOORWAY

Your child has talked about preschool all morning. At the classroom door, their hand tightens around yours. An inviting room and an eager start do not tell you how leaving will feel.

You may recognize the glance that asks for help or know when your child needs a little space. Their teacher is beginning to learn those details. Sharing one useful observation gives the teacher somewhere to start: "When she turns away, sitting beside her with a book often helps."

Before the first morning, agree on who will receive your child, what that adult can offer and how you will hear about the morning. A clear goodbye belongs within that shared plan.[2,3]



An offered activity gives the teacher and child something to share while they get to know each other.

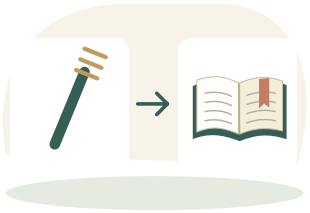
Who will greet your child, and what will they offer?

IN THIS CHAPTER

Understand 15 Try the words 16 Adjust 17 Make a plan 18 Read further 64

CLASSROOM / ROUTINES AT HOME

Routines make listening easier.



A familiar order gives your child a clearer idea of what happens next. Start with one small part of the day.

Make the order familiar

Predictable routines can help children understand what is expected without figuring out the whole sequence each time.[18,35] Familiar cues may make a transition feel less uncertain. They support listening and follow-through; they do not remove the need for adult help.

Choose a moment that often feels rushed: leaving home, ending play or getting ready for bed. Use the same short sequence most days. At bedtime, that might be pajamas, teeth, then a book. The order can stay familiar even when the clock time changes.

Practice together when there is room to go slowly. Put needed items within reach, show the next step and let your child do a manageable part. "Your pajamas are on. Next, we brush teeth together."

Show it, then adjust it

If words alone are hard to follow, use a photo, a quick drawing or the real object. Point to it as you name the step.[35] Two pictures can be enough: "First brush teeth, then choose our book." Show how to use them; a picture is not automatically meaningful.

Keep the words familiar across caregivers where practical. Offer a choice within the routine: "The blue pajamas or the striped ones?" If your child gets stuck, check for tiredness, discomfort or a step that needs more help before repeating the direction.

When plans change, name what is different and what stays the same: "Tonight we are reading at Grandma's. We still brush teeth before our book." After a difficult evening, return to the routine with support. There is no perfect streak to protect.

Try one routine for a few days. Notice where your child begins more easily and where you still need to simplify or help.

CHOOSING A PRESCHOOL / FIT AND CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

Weigh the whole day, including your family's.



A suitable program has to work in practice: for your child's participation, their care and the arrangements your family can sustain.

Separate needs from preferences

Identify what is essential now: workable hours, safe care, communication access and support for health or developmental needs. Then identify preferences such as distance, outdoor space or a particular approach. Keep a concern about care separate from a wish for a different feature.

A longer drive may be acceptable for one family and make attendance unworkable for another. Compare the actual schedule, rest opportunities, fees, closures and pickup rules. Ask what is included and what arrangements change when a staff member is absent.

If choices are limited, concentrate your questions on the changes that matter most. A clear plan for help with the bathroom or communication may be more immediately useful than finding a program with every preferred feature.

Read what the program promises

Ask for written expectations about illness, medication, allergies, toileting assistance, behavior and urgent contact. Check the applicable license or oversight information and official inspection records. Ask about unclear policies or unresolved findings.

Ask who supervises children, how staff prepare for emergencies and how they verify authorized pickup. Add: "What is your policy on staff using personal cell phones while supervising children?" Then ask: "When staff need a device for school tasks, how is supervision maintained?"

Ask how family visits, photographs and recordings are handled, including access and storage. A camera feed does not replace reliable supervision or a response to concerns. Request the written device policy so you can revisit the answer.

Before deciding, finish this sentence with the program: "For my child to participate comfortably, the adults will need to..."