A Gentle, Confident Start to Preschool

How GMPS supports children and families through separation

Starting preschool is a big step - for children and parents.

At GMPS, we do not expect children to arrive on the first day without preparation. We provide a thoughtful runway leading up to school, so children can meet their teachers, become familiar with the school, and begin recognizing the people who will be part of their day.

Is it normal for a child to cry at drop-off?

Yes. Some children run into school without looking back, while others need more time and reassurance. Tears at drop-off do not necessarily mean a child dislikes school or remains unhappy after a parent leaves.

For many children, saying goodbye is the hardest part. Once they enter the classroom, connect with a teacher, and become interested in an activity, their feelings often change quickly.

At GMPS, we prepare for separation before the first day and support each child according to their individual temperament and needs.

Your child's runway to preschool

For many GMPS children, preschool is their first regular experience away from a parent or caregiver. Our transition activities help make the teachers, children, classroom, and school environment feel more familiar before the first full day.

1	2	3
Home Visit	**Park Playdate**	**Meet & Greet Day**
One of your child's teachers visits your family at home, where your child feels most comfortable. When school begins, your child already has a familiar face to recognize: "That's my teacher. She came to my house."	Your class organizes a casual playdate before school begins. Children start seeing future classmates, while parents meet other families. Even recognizing a few faces can make the first days feel less unfamiliar.	Children visit GMPS with a parent or caregiver, meet their teachers, explore the classroom, play on the playground, and begin getting to know classmates and families before attending on their own.

How does car-line drop-off work at GMPS?

GMPS uses a car line for both drop-off and pick-up. We use two locations to minimize traffic congestion. You will receive information specific to your class and route before school begins.

At drop-off, teachers greet your child at the car, help them out, and bring them to join their class. Parents offer a loving and confident goodbye, and the child moves directly into the school routine with a trusted adult.

In our experience, this warm, clean break is usually easier for young children than a long goodbye at the classroom door. It avoids the difficult moment when a child feels caught between staying with a parent and entering the classroom.

Arrive at car line	Greet a teacher	Say a loving goodbye	Join the class	Begin the day

The same routine each day helps children know what to expect and gradually feel more confident.

What happens after I drive away?

Teachers focus first on helping your child connect with a caring adult and become involved in play or another welcoming classroom activity.

For many children, the anticipation of saying goodbye is harder than actually being at school. A child may be tearful while leaving the car and then happily playing with classmates just a few minutes later.

A reassuring brightwheel update

Once your child has settled, a teacher will send you a quick update through brightwheel. Very often, it includes a smiling picture of your child playing with friends - not long after you saw tears at car line. We know the first separation can be emotional for parents, too, and this message lets you know your child is safe, supported, and beginning to enjoy the day.

What if my child needs more time?

Every child is different. Some children feel comfortable immediately, while others need several school days or a more gradual adjustment.

Teachers may stay close, offer comfort, invite a child into a favorite activity, connect them with a classmate, or give them a special classroom job. We often have extra staff on deck at the beginning of the year, so teachers have the time and flexibility to provide that individual support.

Teachers acknowledge that a child misses their family while also communicating calm confidence and the message: *"You are safe. Your teachers will take care of you. Your family will come back."*

When a child needs additional support, teachers and parents work together on an approach based on that child's personality, experiences, and needs.

Helpful ways to prepare

- ✓ Talk positively and simply about school.
- ✓ Remind your child about the teacher who visited your home.
- ✓ Keep the morning routine as predictable as possible.
- ✓ Offer a loving but brief goodbye.
- ✓ Use clear language about when you will return.
- ✓ Allow the teacher to take over at car line.

Try to avoid

- Leaving without saying goodbye.
- Returning repeatedly for one more hug.
- Asking your child whether they want you to stay.
- Showing uncertainty about whether you are leaving.

Although well-intended, a prolonged or uncertain goodbye can make the transition more difficult.

It is completely understandable for parents to feel emotional. Children often take their cues from the adults they trust, so showing confidence at car line can help them begin the day with greater confidence, too.

Building Confidence, One Goodbye at a Time

The goal is not to prevent children from ever feeling sad. The goal is to help them experience separation with caring adults, predictable routines, and the growing knowledge that they are safe, and their family always returns. Each successful goodbye builds trust, confidence, independence, and a sense of belonging.

Before the first day

- ✓ Welcome your child's teacher for the home visit.
- ✓ Attend the class park playdate when you can.
- ✓ Come to Meet & Greet Day together.
- ✓ Watch for class-specific car-line instructions.
- ✓ Make sure brightwheel notifications are turned on.
- ✓ Practice one brief, confident goodbye phrase.

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