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‘GIVE THEM... BIGGEST HUG’

Teachers offer advice for first day of kindergarten

Alicia Doyle Special to Ventura County Star | USA TODAY NETWORK

Parents of children starting kindergarten this year got some helpful tips for their child’s big day during a kindergarten kickoff Saturday in Simi Valley.

“Parents have anxiety about the separation, too, because children starting kindergarten or transitional kindergarten is a big deal,” said Mary Linn Daehlin, director of the Moorpark/Simi Valley First 5 Neighborhood for Learning, which put on the event. Youngsters checked out arts and crafts, story time and a magic show at the Boys & Girls Club of Simi Valley while their parents were in another room for a workshop titled, “What to Expect in Kindergarten.”

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Don Jackson and Jake Shattell of Simi Valley make arts and crafts during a free kindergarten kickoff

Media

Dan, Jackson and Jake Shortley, of Simi Valley, make arts and crafts during a free kindergarten kickoff presented by Moorpark/Simi Valley First 5 Neighborhood for Learning on Saturday at the Boys & Girls Club in Simi Valley. PHOTOS BY ALICIA DOYLE/SPECIAL TO THE STAR



Skyler Roberts, 5, of Simi Valley, makes arts and crafts during the kickoff event on Saturday.

Kindergarten

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The workshop was led by Teri Smyres, a kindergarten teacher at Park View Elementary in Simi Valley, and Nicholas Jarrard, who teaches junior and transitional kindergarten at Park View.

Here are some of their ideas:

Take your child to visit the school ahead of time:

“That way, they’re familiar with where they’re going to go, and they know what the school looks like,” Daehlin said. “But be sure to check with the office first,” Smyres added. “We don’t condone people wandering around campus without permission.”

Be excited: “When you’re shopping for school supplies, whatever they’re getting, just be excited about it,” Daehlin said. “If the parents are excited about it, the child will be, too.”

Talk about school: “You can tell stories about your experiences in school,” Smyres said. “That’s really fun for children.”

Communicate from Day 1: On the first day of kindergarten, as parents are walking their child to the classroom, “the biggest thing is definitely communicating with them,” Jarrard advised. “Talk about their daily routine and what they’re going to do that day. Tell them, ‘We’re going to walk to the classroom! You’re going to see the teacher!’ And be upbeat.”

Be encouraging: Children take cues from their parents’ emotions, Jarrard said. “They can totally tell if Mom or Dad’s having a bad day or a good day.” He reminded parents that the children are nervous, whether they’re showing it or not. “They’re going to a room they’ve never been to, so they need that encouragement and that push that it’s going to be OK.”

Don't cry in front of the child: "It sends a child a really wrong message that this is something scary and not a good place to be," Smyres said.

Go away: "Once the child is in the classroom and you know that your child is secured, walk out the door. You don't want to hang out and stare through the window, because that's not good," Jarrard said. "This causes a lot more fear in the child because they'll keep looking and looking and see your face."

Even if the child is upset, go away: "Say your goodbye, give them the biggest hug that you can give them, tell them it's going to be OK and walk away," Jarrard said. "It's so hard when you're trying to help a child that's hysterical and they're seeing this parent in the window watching them this whole time. ... They're thinking it's not OK." Smyres said it's rare for a child to cry all day. "That doesn't happen," she said. "They're crying because this is new and different. They're also crying because sometimes Mom looks a little tentative."

Be cheery when the child gets home: "Ask them, 'How was your day? What did you do? Did you get to meet your teachers? Did you find any new friends?'" Jarrard suggested. "Try to build that and try to help them remember names."

Have your child draw a picture: "It's a good thing for them because some children in my class tend to have fine motor development skills that need to be worked on," Jarrard said. "Some may have never held a pencil before."

Label everything: "Make sure your child's name is on everything, their clothes, their lunch box, even if it's just the initials," Smyres said. "One year we had seven identical Spider-Man backpacks. So you have to put their names on everything."

Remind the child every day who's picking them up: "It's often that parents will drop them off the first day, then the babysitter or day care is picking them up which can cause anxiety the second day," Smyres said. "So make sure they know who's going to pick them up and who's going to drop them off every day."

Remind the child every day about lunch: Explain whether lunch is packed or if they're buying from the cafeteria. "Children don't understand choices yet, so start at home by saying these are your choices, and asking them what they want to eat that day," Smyres said. "Just make sure they know what they're going to have for lunch, if they brought it from home or getting it from the cafeteria."

Leave a handwritten note in the lunchbox: "If they're packing a lunch or a snack, they could write a little message on something and we'll read it to them," Smyres said.

Sometimes, the first day of kindergarten is harder on the parents than it is on the child, Daehlin said.

"You watch them, and they're growing up, and that's the hard thing," she said. "Just know that they're in good hands and they're with their teachers and they're going to learn so much. And parents, you will hear about it at the end of the day when you pick them up, so it's important to be excited about what they do."

Share your back-to-school photos

Snap a photo of your kids on their first day of school and share it with us. We will post the photos on vcstar.com. Use #vcsschools on public social media posts or email yazmin.cruzacruz@vcstar.com and include the child's name and age.



Johanna Fredrics, a library assistant at the Simi Valley Public Library, reads a story to children during the free kindergarten kickoff on Saturday at the Boys & Girls Club in Simi Valley.

PHOTOS BY ALICIA DOYLE/SPECIAL TO THE STAR



A sign greets children on Saturday. The workshop

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