Kindergarten?

by Lara Davis

In the children’s book, A Place Called Kindergarten, the animals in the barn are feeling very worried because Tommy, “their boy,” suddenly stops coming every morning. Discussion happens and the animals piece together some information.

“He got on a big yellow bus.”

“He went to a place called Kindergarten.” “Kindergarten, what’s THAT?”

“Search me,” said the dog.

(p. 11)

If you, as an adult, had been listening, this discussion would have sounded like, “NAYCluckMOObaaNAYcluckMOObaa.” (p. 10)

Perhaps we, as adults, could consider that our children, much like the animals, are hearing us talk about this “place” called Kindergarten and are feeling some angst. Some children have older siblings and already “know the ropes.” For some other children, “Kindergarten” is that unknown realm where all children must go when they become “big” kids. Change can be difficult for all of us, but particularly for a child, who is still developing the concept of time and space and the inner speech needed to reason and anticipate the future.

That’s where WE come in! We can give our children some tools to help prepare them for this new adventure. We can:

* prepare a social story. This would include photos of your child getting ready for the school day: eating breakfast and getting a backpack and lunch ready; riding in a car or school bus; arriving at the school; and, walking into class and greeting the teacher.
* create a daily schedule with picture cues for your child to follow.
* drive by the school and do “practice runs” prior to the first day.
* read a variety of children’s literature. A Place Called Kindergarten by Jessica Harper; Is Your Buffalo Ready for Kindergarten, by Audrey Vernick; Jake Starts School, by Michael Wright; Will I Have a Friend?, by Miriam Cohen are a few examples.
* answer questions as honestly as we can, without too much excitement or emotion. “You are going to LOVE it!!” might not be what some children need to hear. And, please, save your crying for AFTER the bus leaves or AFTER you drive away from the school. When we as adults are showing our upset, our children are feeling our upset. Put on your best actor or actress face!
* connect with other parents, sharing our joys and concerns and wishing each other’s children well!

For more information, visit <http://families.naeyc.org>.