



Sesame Family Newsletter

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The nonprofit organization behind Sesame Street and so much more

For Parents

Picking a Preschool

by *Jordan Brown*

A dad discovers that separation anxiety goes both ways.

Featuring:

- Surviving the Morning Drop-Off
- What Makes a Great Preschool?
- Easing the Jitters-- Yours and Theirs
- Preschool Perks

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Games and More: School Days!

Off to school with Sesame pals.

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- [Show and Telly](#)
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From the Workshop



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[Get Sesame Street ringtones and wallpapers for your cellphone at Sesame Street Mobile!](#)

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Picking a Preschool

SURVIVING THE MORNING DROP-OFF

I couldn't believe my luck. I had just handed off my 2-and-a-half-year-old daughter Olivia to one of the teachers at her preschool/daycare center, and much to my delight, she wasn't sobbing. On the contrary, Olivia was sweetly relaxing in her teacher Heather's arms, watching me walk toward the door of her classroom. During the past 10 months that my daughter has been attending preschool, the goodbyes are often difficult. This was the second "good day" in a row. Had my Olivia's separation anxiety about preschool finally abated?



CHILD-CARE NEEDS AT EVERY AGE AND STAGE

"Have a great day, honey!" I said, blowing her a kiss. "I love you!"

Then....

"Daddy, don't leave! I NEED you!" Olivia cried, arms outstretched for yet another hug.

Taking a deep breath, I returned to give her one more hug and kiss, reassuring her that I'd be back "very soon." Then, I drove to a nearby coffee shop to get some work done on my laptop. Deadlines were breathing down my neck, and I was confident I'd be able to concentrate on the work, knowing Olivia was in good hands.

When I picked up Olivia three days later-kidding!... (Okay, it only FEELS like three days have passed when her drop-off ends on clingy and tear-filled note.) What I meant to say was... when I picked up Olivia that afternoon, I first peeked into her classroom and smiled. Sure enough, my daughter was happily sliding down a triangular cushion with a friend. She was giggling and smiling. Olivia spotted me and ran over to give me a big hug. As I put on her coat and hat, Heather handed me a spring-themed collage that Olivia had created that day. "I made that!" Olivia gushed, pointing out the details.

A bit nervously, I asked Heather, "Did she have a good day? I mean, was she crying a LOT?"

"No, Olivia had a great day," she replied. "She stopped crying about two minutes after you left." Heather then recounted all the fun activities Olivia had enjoyed that day. The class had a tea party, sang songs, practiced the alphabet, played games with colors, and much more. Heather mentioned that Olivia was very cooperative during a sharing game.

Even before her teacher told me, I had a hunch that Olivia's tears had ended quickly. Even though I know she enjoys playing with her teachers and friends, the act of saying goodbye in the morning remains a stumbling block. Sometimes, as Olivia and her big brother Finn get into the car in the morning, she will anticipate the day's events by saying, "I don't want to go to school." Naturally, she'd rather spend the whole day playing with Mommy or Daddy at home.

Even on the days when the goodbyes are teary, my wife Ellen and I know that we made an excellent decision in sending her to this particular preschool/daycare center. Finding it took a while, but we were determined to send Olivia to a place where she would be safe and loved while she's there, have many wonderful opportunities to play with

[What is best for your child?
This handy chart helps you weigh your options.](#)

DAY-CARE DILEMMA
[Should I send my 2-and-a-half year old to day care?](#)

SNEAK PREVIEW OF PRESCHOOL LIFE
[What to expect as your child embarks on an amazing school adventure.](#)

SEPARATION
[A step-by-step look at how little children grow into independent beings.](#)

other kids her age, and learn some basic skills that will one day help her in kindergarten.

WHAT MAKES A GREAT PRESCHOOL?

Ellen and I are thrilled with Olivia's preschool, but I suspect some of you will be shocked to learn it's a 45-minute drive from our home. Yup, you read that right. 45-minutes. Last summer when we moved from a big city to a rural community, we knew the search for childcare would be a challenge. Back in the city, there were dozens of great preschools within a few blocks of our apartment. And, of course, there were lots of panicky parents who worried that if they didn't get their kid into the "right" preschool, their little ones would not be accepted at an Ivy League college, and would be doomed to a life of hopeless squalor. In the country, however, preschools are much harder to come by. Many more parents here do not send their children to school until kindergarten. As a result, the higher-quality preschools that do exist are completely booked a year ahead. Early in our preschool search, we realized that we would have to spread a wide net, and be willing to travel.

If you're thinking of sending your child to preschool in the near future, here are some tips to keep in mind:

* **START YOUR SEARCH EARLY** - Give yourself plenty of time to research and evaluate your options by starting your search early. If the school has a waiting list, get on it--you can always say "no" later. Visit the preschool at least twice, with your child, to get a feel for the environment. Have your child play in the classroom for a few minutes, and meet the teachers. Does it seem like a good fit?

* **WILL YOUR CHILD BE SAFE?** - When Ellen and I visited various preschools, one of our main concerns was safety. We asked preschool directors questions such as, "What is your procedure for handling medical emergencies?" "Are your teachers trained in First Aid?" "How are parents notified if injuries occur?"

* **WHAT WILL YOUR CHILD LEARN?** - In the process of searching for preschools, we learned that most daycare centers provide a safe environment for kids to play, but they do not necessarily provide much in the way of education. Since toddlers are natural sponges--absorbing all they see and hear--it seemed a waste for Olivia to spend so much time in preschool and not have the opportunity to master some basic skills.



PICKING THE RIGHT PRESCHOOL

[Check out a preschool's merits with these helpful guidelines.](#)

IS YOUR CHILD SAFE WHEN YOU'RE NOT THERE?

[To be sure your child is safe, review these all-important checklists and reminders.](#)

SCHOOL DAZE

[Take the time to find a school that matches your child's needs.](#)

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A PRESCHOOLER

[An inside look at preschool.](#)

THE SECRET LIFE OF YOUR PRESCHOOLER

[What does your child do all day at school? Let's take a peek.](#)

* IS THE PRESCHOOL LICENSED? - When evaluating a potential preschool or daycare center, we asked if it was licensed by the state. If a school or daycare center is licensed, this means that they'll guarantee such things as appropriate teacher/student ratio and room space, and follow strict guidelines regarding safety and dietary needs.

*WHAT ARE THE PRESCHOOL'S CURRICULUM GOALS?

- Since preschool is not mandated, curriculums vary greatly from school to school. In addition to learning ABCs and 123s, we wanted to know if the curriculum included cooperation skills. Would the children be exposed to music and dance? Would they have plenty of opportunities to engage in pretend play, cook simple recipes, and so on? In short, what did the preschool's director consider important? Take the time to meet the various teachers. Do they really seem to enjoy playing with the kids, or is this just a job for them?

* WHAT TOYS AND EQUIPMENT ARE AVAILABLE? -

When looking at potential preschools, we noted what kinds of toys and playground equipment they provided. The best schools offered a variety of toys that could entertain and enrich children for hours. We also looked at the condition of the toys--did they look new or "newish"--or were they all depressingly worn? This brings us to the "gut factor"--something that is VERY important! If you feel a sense of wonder and joy when you enter a preschool classroom, you've probably found a worthwhile place. On the other hand, if your instinct is to clutch your child close to you, lest he or she actually touch anything, then you should definitely continue your search elsewhere.

* WILL IT BE EASY TO MEET OTHER FAMILIES? - What opportunities does the preschool provide for meeting other families? Being a stay-at-home parent can be very lonely. A good preschool makes an effort to broaden your social network. By meeting other parents and their kids, you'll have new opportunities for playdates, get-togethers etc., which will help build your child's social confidence.

EASING THE JITTERS--YOURS AND THEIRS

As difficult as Olivia's goodbyes can be, they are nothing like what we went through when our son Finn was 2 and a half. For as long as we can remember, Olivia has been incredibly verbal and a "social butterfly." She delights in meeting new people, and enjoys diving into new experiences. Finn, however, has always been shy and cautious. Since he was a "late talker," and didn't start speaking full sentences until almost the age of 3, we were a little concerned that he could have a hard time in preschool.

It turns out our instincts were correct. "Hard time" doesn't tell the half the story. To learn about Finn's early preschool experiences, read the link to the right, titled "Back-to-School Jitters" (especially the section entitled "Preschool Preparations").



BACK-TO-SCHOOL JITTERS

[A father helps his son feel more comfortable at preschool.](#)

PARENTS' PRESCHOOL JITTERS

[Ten common concerns--and good reasons not to worry about them.](#)

10 WAYS TO A GREAT DAY AT PRESCHOOL

[How to ease the tears and fears.](#)

PRESCHOOL PANIC-PREVENTION KIT

[Say bye-bye to those first-day-of-school jitters.](#)

BETTER BYE-BYES

[Great ways to calm back-to-school nerves--yours and your child's.](#)

PRESCHOOL CONFIDENTIAL

[Secrets about thriving in preschool that only other parents can tell you.](#)



PRESCHOOL PERKS

Quality preschools sometimes offer more than a great place for your children to grow and learn. Olivia's school, for example, just began a special Saturday night babysitting service. Each Saturday evening, one of the school's teachers takes care of the students (and their siblings) so the parents can enjoy a night out. Ellen and I jumped at this opportunity. Since we now live out in the "boonies," finding a reliable babysitter hasn't been easy. But, with the preschool's babysitting service, we can actually see a movie in a theater, or have a real conversation that isn't interrupted with cries of, "Daddy, I NEED you!" or "Mommy, Olivia got into the dog food again!"



Best of luck with your own preschool search. As you explore the options, remember to trust your gut, ask lots of questions, and accept the fact that learning to say "goodbye" can be tough for everyone... but it will all be worthwhile.

Jordan Brown

Sesame Workshop

Weekly Trivia

The number of digits on both of Cookie's hands plus the number of digits on both of Big Bird's hands equals _____

- A. 12
- B. 14
- C. 10
- D. 16

The answer is (D) 16. Cookie has ten fingers, and Big Bird has six.

FROM THE WORKSHOP

In 1968 when it began, it was one little street. Now Sesame Street reaches around the world to over 120 countries. Your gift of support will allow Sesame Workshop, the non-profit organization behind Sesame Street, to use media for what may be the greatest good, helping children around the world reach their highest potential.

[Support the Workshop today!](#)

COMMENTS? QUESTIONS?

[Tell us what's on your mind.](#) Kindly note that we are unable to respond to every email received.

ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

Sesame Workshop is a nonprofit educational organization making a meaningful difference in children's lives around the world. Founded in 1968, the Workshop changed television forever with the legendary Sesame Street. Today, the Workshop continues to innovate on behalf of children in 120 countries, using its proprietary research methodology to ensure its programs and products are engaging and enriching. Sesame Workshop is behind award-winning programs like Dragon Tales and Sagwa, The Chinese Siamese Cat, Pinky Dinky Doo and ground breaking multimedia productions in South Africa, Egypt and Russia. As a nonprofit, Sesame Workshop puts the proceeds it receives from sales of Sesame Street, Dragon Tales and Sagwa products right back into its educational projects for children around the world. Find the Workshop online at www.sesameworkshop.org

Sesame Workshop

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