

When Our Kids Need to Change Preschools

Often, children who have been through difficult times at home have to change preschools or schools just when it's hardest for them, when they're going to live in a different place. Even normal transitions such as starting school or changing grades can be more difficult for our kids.

We can ease these transitions and support our kids' social, emotional, and cognitive development. It is important to:

- **Try to keep them in one quality preschool**

If a child is attending a quality preschool, try to arrange for him or her to stay at that preschool even if he or she is changing homes. Transportation and other barriers often can be overcome with creativity and collaboration.

- **Help them say goodbye and hello**

If a change is necessary, make sure the child has a chance to say goodbye to classmates and teachers at the old preschool and is received warmly at the new one, and to take along his or her art work. This helps children process the change and reduces stress and stigma.

- **Watch for signs of stress during transition**

Provide extra support and attention before, during, and after our kids change grades or schools, and get help and support to meet all family needs.

How to Find a Quality Preschool

For assistance choosing an early care and education program, talk with your caseworker about locating a Head Start or Pre-Kindergarten program that meets your family's needs. Use the following resources to find a quality preschool in your area:

In Chicago:

- [Action for Children](#)
Provides specialized referrals for foster families. Ask your caseworker to contact them and they will call you.
- www.earlychildhoodchicago.org
List of all Head Start & pre-Kindergarten programs

Anywhere in Illinois:

- www.ilheadstart.org/a2zlistings.html
Illinois Head Start Association—lists all Head Start programs statewide
- www.isbe.net/earlychi/html/directories.htm
List of Illinois' state-funded preschool programs, sorted by county
- [Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies](#)
Sixteen Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies serve 102 counties in Illinois. To contact your CCRRA, call 877-20-CHILD / 877-202-4453 or visit www.ilchildcare.org

Our kids deserve a fair start.



Enroll them in a quality preschool today.

Our Kids Need to Be Ready for School

Being ready for school is key to a child's future success. And being "ready" means more than reading and writing—it includes having social skills and being emotionally healthy. Kids who are ready for school are cooperative, creative, and physically healthy. They can do things such as:

- Follow directions
- Get along with other children and adults
- Be away from parents a few hours at a time
- Show an interest in the world and how things work
- Ask a trusted adult for help
- Say the alphabet
- Use words to express feelings and thoughts
- Go to the bathroom independently

Kids who are ready for school also have a basic understanding of standing in line, taking turns, and other aspects of how school works.

"In first grade, I still remember the other kids saying things like, 'You're stupid!' and 'We learned that in kindergarten!' I hadn't been to preschool or kindergarten, and it showed all over my face."

—De Nishia Yearby, Former Foster Child and DCFS College Scholarship Recipient

Quality Preschool Is the Answer

To develop school-readiness skills and abilities, in the first few years of life kids need to play, make friends, and get positive attention from caring adults. Quality preschool provides these opportunities as well as academic enrichment.

To get ready for school, our kids in particular need more than what can be provided by a safe, nurturing, stable home. They need a quality preschool. When children go through difficulties at home during the early years, they miss out on the stability that other kids take for granted. By enrolling them in quality preschool for at least part of the day, we help them catch up and get a fair start. We also reduce the stigma kids can feel when they've been involved in the child welfare system. And the teachers at quality preschools understand the special needs of our kids and can even help implement their service plans.

"It takes a huge weight off my shoulders to know my kids' special needs are being taken care of while they're being educated. Their preschool teachers work closely with their therapists and with me. I know I can trust them."

—Beth Frye, Foster & Adoptive Parent

What to Look for in a Preschool

All DCFS wards over three years of age, as part of their educational service plans, should be enrolled for at least part of the day in a Head Start program, state pre-Kindergarten program, or accredited child care center.

There are some things that all parents consider when looking for any form of child care, such as: safety, convenience of location and schedule, Kindergarten preparation, and whether they feel welcome. But families involved with the child welfare system have additional needs—which some quality preschools and full-day, full-year child care centers can meet. These may include on-site supervised visits with biological parents, medical treatments, screenings, and therapies.

When choosing a preschool, look for one that provides:

- Expertise working with children with behavioral issues caused by trauma
- A social and emotional development curriculum
- A welcoming atmosphere for parents at all times
- Staff who have worked with kids experiencing stress or difficulties at home
- Services for parents in times of need
- Medical treatments, screenings and therapies on-site
- Mental health consultants

To be successful academically, children need not only healthy bodies and minds but early learning experiences that prepare them for school.

—Illinois Kids Count 2005