

The first day of nursery – real parents tell their stories

The first day of nursery is a big step for every child and parent or guardian. You're full of worries and doubts, unsure of how your child will react, whether they'll make friends, or even if they'll eat the meals there. To help you make this step, we've asked some of our parents for their advice on how to make the most of the big day.

"Orla Smith is a music teacher from Barcombe in East Sussex. She has two children, Isabelle aged 4 and Owen aged 1. Isabelle loves colouring, drawing and playing imagination games outside and Owen is pretty curious about everything! They both go to Sussex nursery."

With Isabelle, I was apprehensive about how she would be without me around. She was being very fussy about drinking from a bottle and I worried about how well she would sleep there during the day. I felt very emotional and a bit sad when I left her on that first day, which was so different to my experience with Owen.

I took Owen into the baby room a few months before his settling-in sessions to get him used to the room and to meet his Key Person Sarah. She had looked after Isabelle and was fantastic. So I wasn't really very emotional or concerned on his first day as I knew he would have a great time and be well looked after.

I still rang on the first day for both children to get an update on how they were doing. Both times I was given a really good overview of what they'd been up to during the day.

Nowadays, drop off is normally quick and easy, but on the odd occasion when the children have been sad to leave me the team have stepped in to distract and look after them. Owen in particular has had a little bit of separation anxiety, but the team give him a big cuddle when he arrives and he always stops crying once I've left. The team always ask how the children are and if I need to have a chat they always listen.

For parents and guardians who are dropping their child off for the first time, I'd say, if you're concerned at all, ring the nursery for an update. Try not to worry, your child will have a great day interacting with others and will be very well looked after.

“Jo Ballantyne is a savings advisor who lives in Coventry. She has two children, Gabriel aged 4 and Naina aged 3. Gabriel loves his Lego as well as reading and baking and Naina likes to sing, dance, draw and run around with her brother. They both go to Walsall Wood nursery.”

When Gabriel started nursery, he had just turned two and his sister was five months old. I wanted him to go to nursery so he could be with other children of his own age. It would also mean that he could get used to a new environment before he started school. Of course, having my hands full with a toddler and baby at home was overwhelming too, so it was a family decision that made sense for everyone.

It had been almost impossible to get him out of the nursery when we took him for a look around. I, on the other hand, was starting to worry that I wasn't a good mum for deciding to put him in nursery. I worried that he'd cry for hours on end, that he'd not eat when he was there. Everything that could possibly go wrong, I imagined that it would.

I took him into his room and of course, he had a little sob. I found it really difficult to leave the room and when I did, I sat in the car and cried my eyes out. He was only there for a couple of hours to have a short settling-in session, but I'm pretty sure I cried the whole time and couldn't wait to pick him back up again. I called a couple of times to ask how he was and the team were really friendly and helpful. They understood my anxiety and were more than happy to reassure me.

Since then, my son has started reception class at school and my daughter goes to the same Little Pioneers nursery. My daughter doesn't even look back at me or her Nan when she is dropped off! She's very comfortable and happy at nursery and I'm so glad that she feels supported and cared for.

For anyone taking their child in on the first day, I understand how heart-breaking it is. Your baby is getting bigger and you're not there to wipe away tears or translate their babble so that someone else will understand what your child wants. But it's wonderful to hear all the amazing things your child has been doing at nursery, how they're enjoying playing with other children and all the skills they learn. I wish I hadn't given myself such a hard time about sending my children to nursery. Looking back, I chose well and would absolutely do it again.