

Preparing for the Unexpected



For Preschool
Parents/Caregivers

Preschool is a phase often met with great anticipation and excitement, but can also be filled with change, uncertainty, and distress—from both kids and parents!

For children entering into an entirely new environment for the first time, fear and anxiety is common. Understandably, kids have spent the first three to four years learning the rules and expectations of their family life and now are potentially faced with unfamiliar territory (e.g., preschool, children's ministry, daycare) with a new set of rules, routines, and humans to learn.

Whether formal learning occurs primarily at home or in a building, preschoolers are much more vulnerable to challenging thoughts, emotions, and experiences than we adults would like to think. And even when parents and caregivers do everything they can, sometimes kids experience scary and upsetting events. When faced with an unexpected event, kids may struggle to express their thoughts and emotions, and these struggles may present behaviorally.

Preschoolers will need adult support to help them to feel safe and to make sense of the experience.

This worksheet is intended to help you reflect and create a plan ahead of time for how you want to respond if you discover something you never expected. Spend as much time as you need thinking through your responses. They are not for anyone other than you (unless you choose to discuss this with your spouse, co-parent, grandparent, another caregiver, or health professional).

① What do we mean by “the unexpected”?

This is an open-ended idea because our kids are growing up in a world with a vast number of unexpected scenarios. So, in one sense, we can't predict what we can't predict.

However, according to leaders who work with kids, and research provided by U.S. census data, the CDC, and the American Academy of Pediatrics, here are a few scenarios that can be a part of a kid's world that parents frequently fail to anticipate →

Car accidents

Pet loss

Parental separation or divorce

Sudden illness/death in the family

School or community violence

Physical abuse

Sexual abuse

Generalized Anxiety/Phobias

Separation Anxiety

Depression

Cutting/self-harm

Suicidal thoughts

⑥ Name your community.

Every parent has what it takes to navigate challenges with their kids, but none of us can carry the weight alone. If you were to discover something you weren't expecting in your kid's life, who would you be able to call?

Think of someone with whom you feel safe enough to be completely honest about what is happening and what you are feeling.

Every kid who is navigating challenging situations needs their parent's involvement. But a parent may not be the only influence they need. If you were to discover something you weren't expecting, who else in your kid's life could you count on to walk with them through this experience?

Think of someone who shares your values with whom your kid feels safe enough to be completely honest about what is happening.

Your responses to the questions in this resource may be one of the most important things to keep in front of you as a parent. Consider returning to what you have written every year to revise and repeat your response so that you can remember it quickly if you ever need to use it.

Professional Support

If you are concerned about how your child is coping or if you are not coping so well yourself, seek out professional support. Your child's pediatrician or your primary care doctor can assist you with next steps.

Mental Health Emergencies

For mental health emergencies, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255. They have trained people that can help you and your child 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

To learn more about the phase your kid is in right now, download the Parent Cue app and check out our phase-specific cues every week with a monthly subscription.



More Resources at ParentCue.org →