



**Parent
Organization
Network**
Breaking Through Barriers

“Don’t deliver me to school! I am NOT a Pizza!”

By Dr. Shulamit Natan Ritblatt
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The line of cars is long. I am sitting in the car seat behind my mommy. This is my first day in TK, Transitional Kindergarten. Mommy packed my backpack last night and helped me get ready this morning. I am wearing my new clothes and sneakers. I am excited to go to school!

But now something is happening....so many cars... so many children... a lot of people I do not know.... My cheeks are burning. My eyes are watering. I am trying to look out the car window and see what is going on. I see two adults helping to let the kids out of the cars. Some of the kids are waving bye while the cars are leaving the parking lot.

My heart is racing. My mom looks at me through the car mirror and says: “Don’t be stressed. You are going to have so much fun today. I will be back to pick you up later. Soon one of these teachers will open the car door and will help you get out of it and go to the class.” Tears start going down my cheeks. “I want you to come with me! I don’t want to go by myself! I do not want to be delivered to school! I am not a PIZZA!!!”

When 4-year-olds are enrolled in one of the transitional kindergarten programs at one of the school districts across CA, these schools cater to children of different ages and try to establish a unified protocol for drop-off and pickups, regardless of the age group and the appropriate developmental practices. No wonder that in the new report [“Through the Eyes of Parents: California’s Flawed Implementation of Universal Transitional Kindergarten,”](#) parents expressed a high level of frustration with inadequate infrastructure and drop-off protocols, as well as insensitive and not age-appropriate transition from preschool to TK. Parents overwhelmingly stressed the lack of meaningful family engagement opportunities with educators and administrators.

Let’s examine the paradox. We hand-delivered pizzas! We also make sure to carry the pizzas nested in protective boxes. We make sure these pizzas have the required toppings while they are being cuddled in warming pads to maintain and keep their right temperature until the in-person delivery. However, our parents are being asked to disregard their young children’s emotional needs and just drop them off and pick them up by going through the car lane or coming by the gate to do so. These procedures put the school system’s needs above those of the children and their families and they are contradictory to Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) which guides early childhood education.

These gold standards were developed by the [National Association for the Education of Young Children \(NAEYC\)](#) and are based on developmental science. This framework emphasizes the importance of positive relationships for the development and learning of young children. It addresses the need to recognize differences in children and tailor our programs, interactions, and procedures to meet children where they are developmentally. It also highlights the critical role of family engagement in education and calls for partnerships between schools and families to support the development and learning of the child.

When we encounter new situations, places, and interactions, we all feel anxious. We might have a knot in our stomach, pressure in our chest, a headache, or a sense of irritation. Parents and young children alike feel anxious when they need to separate and leave each other with no time to build together ways to say goodbye. We thrive in the context of caring relationships; we need the people who are important to us to support us when we encounter new situations and help us establish routines and rituals that ease the transitions.

School administrators and educators need to recognize the different developmental needs of parents and young children and establish structured and predictable drop-off and pick-up procedures for TK that are congruent with these needs. They need to allow exceptions to the rule, especially during the first weeks of school for the child who is clearly overwhelmed and needs support. Drop-off and pickup procedures for the young TK students can be designed to address the developmental needs of the children and encourage the engagement of families. We can let parents come into the classroom with their child, deliver the child in person to the teacher, and have an opportunity to say goodbye.

I can “hear” educators’ and administrators’ responses to the above suggestion: “We have a school to run and many other issues to attend to. We cannot have parents running around, grabbing the attention of the teacher and making separation more difficult for them and the child. We know best how to deal with children.”

My response to them is: “I do hear you! We all are aware of the limited resources you have and the need to streamline procedures. But I also want to remind us all that we are NOT in the pizza delivery business but in education. We need to address children according to their developmental level and needs.

However, if we must have young children come to school and be dropped off at the curb like all the rest of the students, we need to find ways to facilitate the transition and reduce the anxiety experienced by the child and often by the parent as well. For example, let’s start the academic year for the young ones two weeks prior to the official start day for the rest of the students. During these two weeks, parents will accompany their children to the classroom. They will be welcome to spend time with the child until circle time and learn together to say goodbye. The children will learn and rehearse the drop-off routines with the teacher and their parents. Another suggestion is to have opportunities for parents and children to visit the classroom and interact with the teacher several times during the summer, so the child is familiar with the

teacher, the classroom and the surroundings. During these visits, they can also rehearse the drop-off and pickup routines.

Like in a pizza delivery (the person ordering, the delivery person and the pizza) there are three parties involved in the drop-off and pickup procedure of a child: the parent (adult) who delivers, the teacher (staff member) who receives the delivery and the child. The adults involved in the process need to make sure that the child feels safe and protected. Two-way communication and partnership between the adults focusing on the child's needs and well-being are the keys to a great educational journey and to the desired learning outcomes for the child.



Dr. Shulamit Ritblatt, Professor Emerita, in the Department of Child & Family Development at San Diego State University, is an expert in early childhood social-emotional development focusing on family engagement, mental health, learning readiness, prevention, and early intervention; utilizing relational, reflective, and trauma-informed practices to support healthy development of children and their families. She is the founder and CEO of delibrainy, LLC <https://delibrainy.com/> a company that provides research-based bilingual programs and services to support the social-emotional wellness and learning readiness of young children. She created the Circle of Education® <http://www.circleofeducation.com/> a social-emotional wellness, family engagement, learning readiness, and behavioral health program for young children birth-8. She is the author of multiple articles and books, her most recent being, "[*From Trauma to Resiliency: Trauma-Informed Practices for Working with Children, Families, Schools, and Communities.*](#)"

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

- [Circle of Education, delibrainy LLC](#): Provides research and evidence-based bilingual programs and products to support the social-emotional wellness of young children (ages birth to eight) and provides services in the areas of social-emotional wellness, family engagement, learning readiness, and behavioral health.
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\): "Back to School Resources"](#): Provides resources in English and Spanish that aim to support educators, guide parents and empower students on their mental health journey during the school year and beyond.
- [The National Association for the Education of Young Children \(NAEYC\): "Ready or not, Kindergarten, Here We Come"](#): Provides tips on how parents can help prepare their child emotionally, socially, and academically for TK/K.
- [Scholastic: "6 Expectations for Kindergarten That Parents Should Know"](#): Outlines common challenges kids and parents face when starting TK/K, like bathroom struggles, unfinished lunches, constant illnesses, after-school meltdowns, fidgeting, and feeling disconnected, along with tips to tackle them.

- PBS: "Preparing Your Child for Kindergarten" Video Series: Practical tips on physical, emotional, and academic preparation for TK/K.
- PBS Parents: "Kindergarten Readiness Resources": Checklists and resources for TK/K preparedness.
- Centers for Disease Control: Transitioning to Kindergarten: Guidance for parents and teachers on supporting children through the transition back to in-person early childhood programs, including allowing time to build relationships and using predictable routines.
- School Family: Get Ready for Kindergarten: Tips for parents to help children transition smoothly to kindergarten, including visiting the school, establishing routines, reading books, and focusing on social-emotional readiness rather than academics.
- Motherly: "How to handle difficult school drop-offs...": Tips for parents on how to ease separation anxiety in young children starting preschool or transitional kindergarten, including talking through the routine, establishing goodbye rituals, allowing comfort objects, and projecting confidence at drop-off.
- The Kindergarten Smorgasboard blog: Practical tips and activity ideas from a Kindergarten teacher on transitioning to TK/K successfully.
- American Institutes of Research: Video: Transitional Kindergarten: Growing Children's Early Academic Skills: Explains how student outcomes compare between those who attend transitional kindergarten and those who do not and how a high-quality program can help ensure children receive a strong start to their educational careers.