



Getting ready (or not) for kindergarten

On a chilly evening at the end of March, about 100 parents filed into the gymnasium at Edna C. Stevens Elementary School like lemmings approaching the edge of a precipice. It wasn't our own lives we were about to toss over the edge — it was the lives of our children. We were getting ready to send our offspring to kindergarten.

It's not like I didn't know the day would come — I just didn't expect to be so distraught over the big event so many months in advance. After all, this was not the first day of school; it was parent-orientation night. Apparently, these wise educators were well aware that parents need more preparation for kindergarten than the children do.

The teachers who presented that evening, including the principal and school nurse, answered questions raised by parents, some who, like me, could hardly contain the rising waters of emotion as they spoke. Each did his or her very best to allay parental anxiety about the first day of school. The teachers calmed us with stories of successful first-day adventures. The principal cautioned us to remain calm at drop-off. And we were encouraged to be involved in our children's school experience.

Before they sent out the door with homework (forms to complete), they presented an amazing video choreographed to music by the Black Eyed Peas, "I Got a Feeling (Tonight's Gonna' Be a Good Night)." In the video, produced by Mrs. Chapman (bravo!) children sing about "reading a good, good book." Students and teachers bob to the beat and read their favorite stories on the bus, on the playground, in the cafeteria and the classrooms.

Every second of that eight-minute video weakened the dam holding back every conceivable emotion I could possibly experience: joy, pain, excitement, fear and love. This flood of feelings carried me faster than my human feet have ever moved back

to the safety of my car.

Back at the house, I presented my daughter with her ECS T-shirt, which she wore to her last day at preschool. Her excitement about kindergarten makes me nervous. What if she's disappointed? What if she has a miserable first day? And (gasp!), what if she has an incredible day? What does her reaction, one way or the other, mean for me as her mom? I begin to question my skills as a parent. Did I teach her well enough, that out there, off the edge of the precipice into the great wide open, she'll make smart choices? I imagine asking myself these same questions years from now when she moves out of the house.

After she has gone to bed, I give my husband a recap of the evening. He chuckles as I get teary-eyed and my voice squeaks out instructions for filling in one of the forms. He reassures me, as if he had read my mind, that our daughter will be just fine because I — we — have done a great job. And if I'm worried about that, he says, all I have to do is look back at how she's developed from a timid, uncertain toddler into a gregarious, confident little girl. He's right.



Life in Cromwell
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