

# Starting school.....

Finding out what's comfortable for you is key here, hopefully through the methods that I use you'll find a comfort zone so both you and your child's transition into school can be a happy and worry free one.

Before school starts make an initial contact with the Director/Principle and explain that your child has a limb difference and that you would like the opportunity to meet with the teacher to discuss coming into the classroom on the 1<sup>st</sup> day to read a short story and talk with the kids to get all the questions over and done so they can all get on to being Kindergarteners, including your child. I'm sure there will be no problem here.

Most Preschools/Kindergartens will have an orientation, this is a great opportunity to ask the Administrator if you can take a minute and get up in front of the parents and tell them that their child will be going to school with your son/daughter that is missing his/her \_\_\_\_\_ and you hope that by you taking this opportunity to talk with the parents that in turn they might talk with their children about how all people are different in some way but yet all the same on the inside. Ask the parents to tell their child about your child so they can talk about being different, in order to help make the first day of school an happy transition for all of us. I have found this to work famously, there were no surprises for anybody when the first day of school came around!

Here we are the first day of school. My daughter prefers 2 things. 1<sup>st</sup> to be in class and a part of the class as Mom just hangs out to wait for "her" time and 2<sup>nd</sup> stay with the group as I do the presentation. Talk with your child to find out what comfortable for them.

*Before I start as I am looking over all the kids, I remind myself of a few things. How exciting it is to be in the position to have all these wonderful children's minds to open up to differences, something that will now become a part of them. What I am about to do will help them to become a more compassionate person not only for my child but for others to come...exciting, not scary!*

After I introduce myself as Lisha's Mom I tell them how happy "we" are to be in this class and how excited "we" are to make all our new friends! I have a short story I'd like to read to them. I choose at this point to read "Harry and Willy and Carrothead." I think with the younger grades it is easier for them to directly relate b/c Harry is a real person with a short arm. As I begin to read I become very animated, my eyes may open very wide, I smile big, I change tones in my voice to fit the story line ect. I want the kids to really get into the story

with me and this way they will!

The 1<sup>st</sup> page of the book says when "When Harry was born he had no left hand. His left arm stopped at the elbow" I will stop, my eye's get big, smile and ask is there anybody here in this class like Harry? Inevitably Lisha will burst out with her short arm stuck in the air and boldly say ME! That's if she can hold it in that long! While all the other kids are saying "she's like Harry"

As the story continues it says things like "he cried and cooed and waved his arms just like any other baby"

Again I'll stop and say to the kids "I'll bet when you were a baby you cried, cooed, and waved your arms just like Harry and Lisha" Smiling widely again (attempting again to show them they are all the same) and will continue through the story along the same lines.

The last page I read in the story is where Harry gets older and learns to fingerpaint with his arm and hand. Stopping after reading to ask the class who fingerpaints and when hands are raised I ask what did they paint?

The reason I stop the story here is 2 fold. 1<sup>st</sup> younger kids attention span is only so long and I've hit the points that I've wanted to and 2ndly after that the book goes into the direction of Harry having a prosthetic. At this point Lisha does not wear a prosthetic to school so I have no need to go further.

Now discussion time

I tell the class to look at everybody around them, each other, the teacher, and even me (I do this with them again very animated, I even make my fingers in circles and put them around my eyes so that it looks like I have looking glasses on) we all look very different don't we? I ask the kids to raise their hand and can they tell me how their different from me? Lisha will always say proudly, now b/c she has a short arm while the other kids will site hair, skin, eyes ect. I remind them just b/c we look different on the outside we have to remember, we are all the same on the inside and that's what makes us friends!

Another issue I always go into with kids this age is no touching. They seem to have this natural curiosity to want to touch or grab the short limb. I want to make this very clear there is no touching Lisha. This is something she has a real problem with and with good reason. Here's my approach

Do we all remember that our Mommy and Daddy told us that NOBODY is allowed to touch us (as I shake my head yes through out that whole statement) Just like nobody is allowed to touch us, that also means we are not allowed to touch anybody else that even means no matter how bad you want , not even Lisha's short arm (with that statement I'm in my serious mode) BUT if you REALLY ( I get really animated again) want to know what her arm feels like all you have to do is pull your sleeve all the way up ( I do so and all the kids will too!) gently take your right hand, hold yours in the air, and lay it on top of you left arm and rub softly (you'll see as you do this all the kids will be rubbing their arm) and guess what?!! That's what Lisha's arm feels like, just like yours. So when you

really, really want to touch her arm all you have to do is rub your own b/c we cannot touch hers. (shaking my head no)

At this point I ask Lisha to come up with me and I ask the kids if they have any questions, they always do! Lisha takes the questions and gives the answers knowing that I'm right there to help out if she needs me. The reason I chose to do this is it opens up the dialect between her and her classmates. Once they start talking and the ice is broken, were now past this subject and onto life as a preschooler or kindergartener.

After the questions are over I always thank the class for being such good listeners and such good friends to Lisha.

This year b/c of being in elementary school and Lisha coming in contact with all of the other grades I'll be going into all of the other grades teaching about limb differences. Again what a gift to be able to open up all of these children's minds!