



Chapter 14

Getting Ready for Child-care and School

In some communities, there are places where young children are cared for while their families work. They are often called nursery schools, day-care centers, child-care centers, preschools, or creches.

A child who is blind or cannot see well can go to a child-care center with other children. And when your child is old enough, she should attend school like other children her age. In order to make these experiences fun and successful, you can:

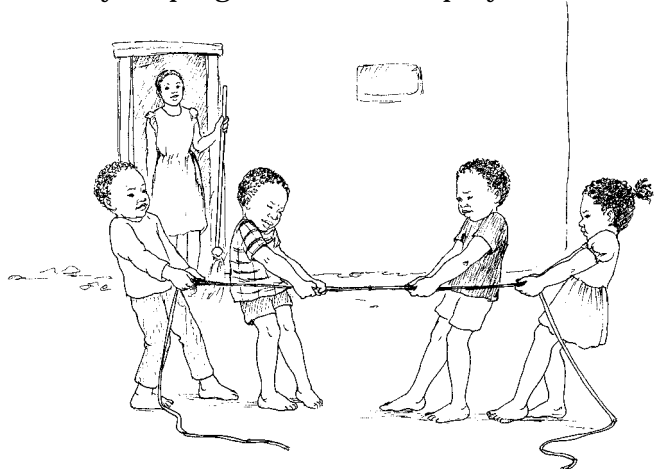
- help your child prepare for child-care or school
- help the child-care center or school teacher prepare for your child

Helping your child prepare for child-care and school

► *To learn to play with groups of children*

At school, your child will be playing a lot with other children. Long before she goes to school, you can help her prepare by encouraging her to play with others, and by helping other children play with her.

If your child has experience playing with friends before she starts school, she will find it easier to make new friends once she is in school.



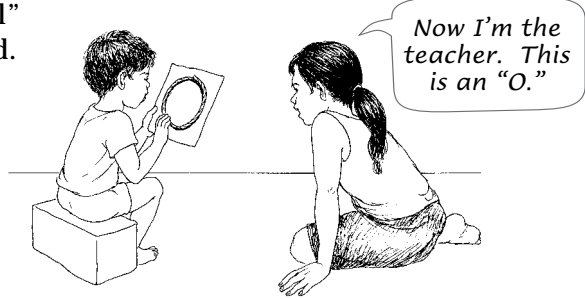
► **To learn what child-care or school is like**

If your child does not spend much time with older children, she may not understand what happens at child-care or school because hearing stories about school is how many children learn about it. A child who is blind or cannot see well may also be afraid to be away from her family for several hours. To help her understand about child-care or school:

Tell her some of the exciting things about child-care or school.

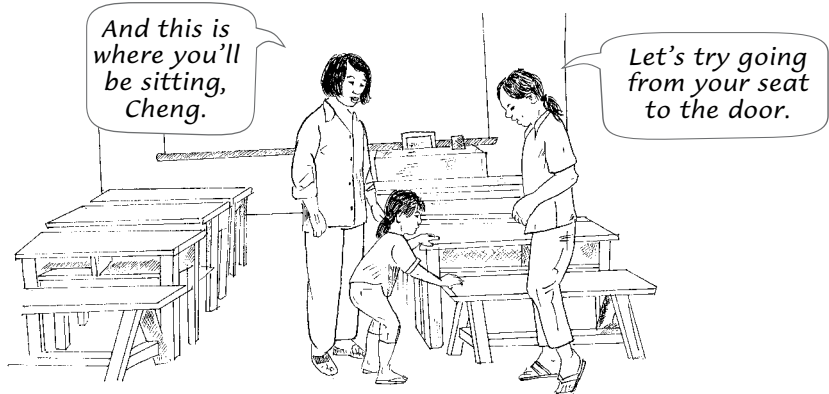


Ask an older child to "play school" with your child.



► **To get to know the child-care or school building**

Your child will feel more comfortable on her first day of school if she has visited the school before and has learned how to get around on her own. Try to visit and meet the teacher when there are no other children present.

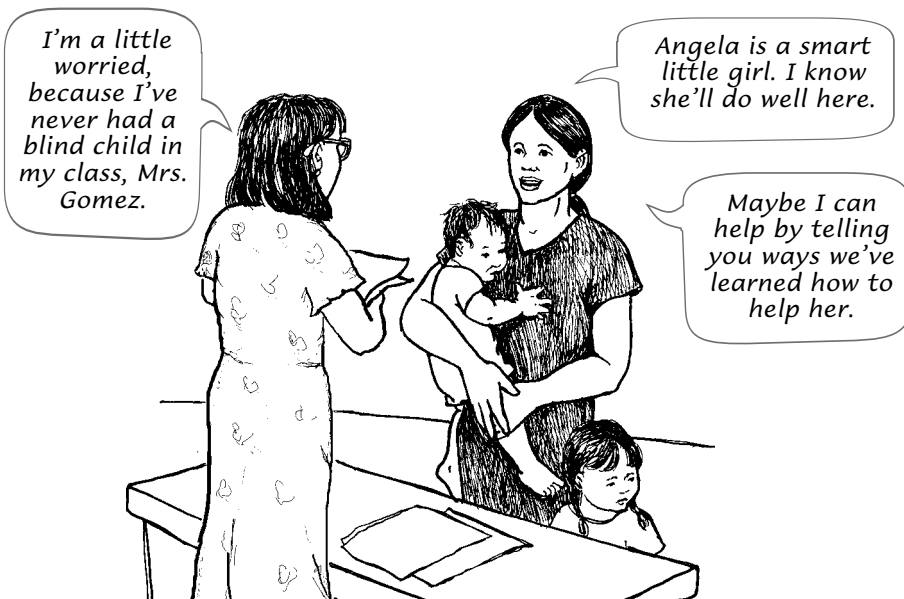


Helping the school get ready for your child

► *To help the teacher understand your child*

A teacher who has not worked with children who are blind or cannot see well may be unsure about how to teach your child. You know more about your child than anyone else, and there are many things that you can share with the teacher. Here are a few things you may want to talk about with the teacher:

- Tell the teacher about your child's skills and abilities.
- Show the teacher how to help your child move around the school.
- If your child can see a little, explain what she can see and how your child uses her sight.
- Remind the teacher that your child cannot see gestures or facial expressions, so instructions have to be spoken.
- Discuss any challenges your child has.
- Share information about blindness and how it affects a child's development.



The section on how community members can help, starting on page 126, has suggestions the teacher might find useful too. You may especially want to share some of the ideas for helping children understand more about blindness and ways to include children who cannot see well in children's games.

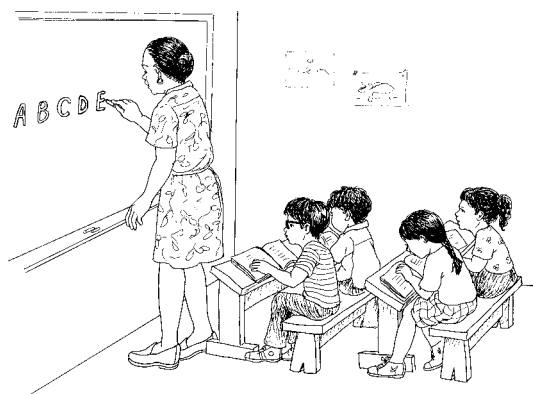
► *To prepare the classroom for your child*

Talk to the teacher about the classroom, and see if there are simple ways to make the room safer and more comfortable for your child.

You may want to:

- explain how a child who is blind can bump into things and how it helps to keep doors fully open or closed
- explain the importance of keeping things in the same place so that your child can move around with confidence
- decide if it will be better for your child to sit in the front of the room near the teacher

If your child can see the letters of the alphabet, the teacher should write on the blackboard in large thick letters and check often to see if your child can see them.



Preparing to read and write

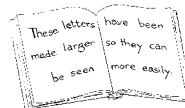
If your child can see a little, try to find out if anything would help your child be able to see letters. If your child can see the letters of the alphabet, he may be able to read by:



wearing glasses



using a magnifying glass (a piece of glass that makes small letters look bigger)



reading large-print books in which the letters are bigger so they can be seen more easily

If your child has trouble keeping up with the reading at school, you can:

- ask someone to read books and lessons aloud to him.
- ask someone to read his books into a tape recorder, so he can listen to the books later.
- consider teaching him Braille (see page 139). This may be the best choice if your child's eyesight is likely to get worse.

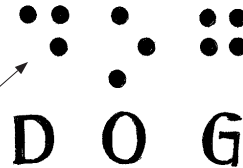
Learning to read and write Braille

If your child cannot see letters or is blind, a specially trained teacher can teach him to read and write using a system called 'Braille'. Braille may look difficult, but that is only because it is new to you. Most children and adults can learn Braille easily.

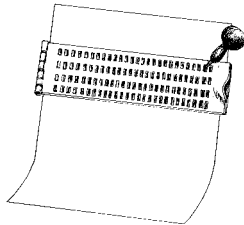
There may be special schools or classes for children who are blind, and teachers who will teach Braille to children.



To read Braille, a child runs his fingertips over patterns of bumpy dots that stand for letters of the alphabet. These 'letters' are put together to make words, like this.



To write Braille, a child can use different tools. These are the most common writing tools — a slate and stylus.



A child writes with a slate and stylus by pushing the tip of the stylus into heavy paper on the slate. The stylus pushes dots into the paper. He can then turn the paper over to read the raised dots with his fingers.

A child will be able to learn Braille more easily if he has strong, flexible fingers. For more information, see page 98.

School is important for all children

Because blind children often do not have the same opportunities as children who can see, school is very important for a blind child's future. Blind children can go to school and learn a lot, including skills they will need to earn a living.

In some places, children who are blind can go to special schools for the blind. Some local schools may have special programs for children who are blind. With some extra help, blind children can do well in classes with children who can see.

