

Day Care / School Separation Ideas for Parents

1. For an easier adjustment, it is best to build up a child's day care hours over the course of a week so that the first days are shorter in duration. Ideally, parents can alternate half days for the first week of day care.
2. Strive for calm mornings at home before leaving for day care. If you feel too rushed, start getting up 15 minutes earlier and lay out clothes and make lunches the night before. Create the best climate for separating that you can.
3. Send a "lovey" with your child: a soft, familiar item which they can use to comfort themselves. Towards the end of the first year, some babies start to develop an attachment to a warm, soft object or sometimes a more unusual object. These help children feel secure and can make the transition each day from home to school go a bit easier.
4. While driving, talk about where the child is going, where you will be and when you will be returning. Speak in a calm and confident voice, expressing positive feelings that day care is a safe and pleasant place for your child when you cannot be with him.
5. Arrive early enough to spend a few minutes with the child in the day care environment. Greet the caregiver and help the child settle in by walking around the room together.
6. Try to let the caregiver know about anything unusual that happened the night before or that morning.
7. For infants: Remind the baby that you need to leave and when you will be returning while still holding him. Then pass the baby to the caregiver. Smile and wave goodbye. Turn and walk away with confident steps. Don't look over your shoulder anxiously – this can convey a lack of confidence in the child's ability to cope or in the caregiver.

Example: "I'm going to leave for work now and I will see you after your nap. I'm going to let (name of caregiver) hold you while I leave. I love you. (Give a kiss and pass to caregiver.) Here is your blanket. See you after your nap. Bye-bye."

8. Never sneak out while the child is distracted. Doing so will damage the trust you have worked so hard to establish and will interfere with your child's other relationships as well. When sneaking out, you won't have to deal with such difficult feelings but your child will still feel that "jolt" after she has realized that you aren't coming right back. It's better to go through it together in a straightforward manner.
9. Upon returning to pick child up: "I'm so glad to see you. I miss you while I'm at work, but I know you are just fine while I'm gone."
10. Keep in mind that illness, lack of adequate sleep, change in schedule due to trips, weekends, etc. may be enough to cause reversion of behaviors of when

first separated. This is normal; by expecting that it may happen, we are not knocked off balance. The child may go back to crying, but it probably won't last as long as it did initially.

Some additional ideas:

- A. Never threaten to leave a child somewhere when they are misbehaving.
Example: "If you don't come right now, I am going to leave you here." Threats like this can increase a child's anxiety in other settings too. Instead say, "I know it is hard to leave. You can walk with me or I can help you. Teddy Bear is waiting for you in the care."
- B. Some children find it helpful to have a picture of Mom/Dad in their cubby to hold whenever they want to.
- C. Some children will enjoy listening to a recording of mommy or daddy reading a story or singing songs while they are at day care. This is especially useful when English is the child's second language.
- D. Older children (2 years and up) can be taken to the workplace sometime so that they can visualize where you are more easily during the day. This ability helps them to feel more in control and less confused about these separations.
- E. Preschool children will feel more comfortable in a group when they have spent some time with another child in a one-on-one situation. Inviting a child from day care to play on the weekend can nurture a developing friendship.
- F. Let your 2 year old or preschooler bring in something to share with the group" apples from your tree or oatmeal cookies or banana bread she helped you make are all great ways to help your child feel like part of the "family."

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