

THE

Well-Centered CHILD

SAYING GOOD-BYE GETS EASIER WITH TIME

"Honey, please let go. Mommy has to leave now," urged Becky's mom, wondering if she would have to drive to work with a thirty pound preschooler clamped to her leg. But even though it was getting late, the thought of walking out on her sobbing daughter troubled her. Other children were waving annoyingly cheerful good-byes to their parents.

But not Becky. And Becky was what mattered to her right now.

Sometimes it's difficult to know what to do when your child cries or clings when it's time for you to leave. Such behavior is not unusual or unreasonable for young children. Even ones who have been to school before can fall apart at the last minute and it may continue for some time. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Arrive on time and greet the teacher like an old friend. If you're among the first to arrive, the room will be quieter. Your child will have a chance to see you talking in a friendly way to the adult who will care for him. It's easier for a child to accept a new teacher as a caregiver (and human being!) if it's clear that you like her, too.

2. Bring along a comfort item to leave with your child. It might be a picture of you, a special blanket or stuffed toy. A wise person once described such security items as being like a "portable mom." They do help. In much the same way, a parent who leaves a scarf or other personal item with a toddler is also leaving a concrete message "A piece of me is with you. I'll be back."

3. Don't slip away while your child is busy playing. Doing so may cause her to mistrust you and will only lead to more determined clinging next time. Always let your child know that you're leaving. You'll be helping her learn that separation can be faced and managed.

4. Tell your child when you'll return. Although your child can't tell time yet, he can understand ideas like, "I'll be back when you're playing outside after naptime." Be sure to return when you said you would.

5. Say good-bye quickly. Say it cheerfully. And confidently. (Even if you don't quite feel that way the first few times.) Every since he was

a baby, your child has checked the expression on your face to find out how to react. When you look worried, he feels worried. Looking cheerful and confident says, "You can handle this!"

6. Call the school later if you're concerned. Just as you might give a regretful sigh when seeing a loved one off at the airport, so might your child cry briefly when you say goodbye.

Because she's sad when you leave doesn't mean she'll be sad all day, however. Give the school a call later on. Knowing that she's settled in can help you feel better.

It's okay to take a while to learn to say good-bye to someone you love. It helps to keep in mind that saying good-bye gets easier with time and experience. Eventually, your child will understand fully that you'll always return, and will be able to let you go with trust and confidence.

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