Helping Children Say Goodbye

Life is filled with experiences of parents and children saying “good-bye.” It begins when parents leave their child with a babysitter for an evening out or with a child care provider while they go to work. As the child grows, the “good-byes” include going to “big school,” going away to camp, going to college, and getting married. Preparing children for separation from a parent in a child care situation is a team effort that includes parents, teachers and the director or family child care provider.

Helping children adjust to new environments can be both challenging and frustrating. Many children experience separation anxiety when left in new surroundings or when having to say good-bye. Experiences such as this not only cause anxiety in children, but may cause guilt to surface in the parent. Directors and teachers can play an important role in how children and parents adjust to these new situations.

Try implementing these suggestions to lessen the anxiety and guilt associated with saying “good-bye.”

**Director’s Role**

1. When enrolling children, be sure to address separation anxiety. Include how this is a normal behavior and that you plan to help parents through this stage of growth.

2. Create a questionnaire which will give staff the history on how the child has previously adjusted to separation and changes. In addition, you may want to ask the parent how the child reacted to each of these changes. Questions asked might include:
   a. Have you moved in the last six months?
   b. Has there been a death in the immediate family, close friend or pet?
   c. How does your child react when you leave him/her with a babysitter, relative or neighbor?
   d. Does your child have any fears?
   e. At what age was your child potty trained? If so, how did he/she adjust?
   f. Does your child have any particular food that he/she dislikes?
   g. Does your child have a favorite toy or “lovey?”
   h. How long is a normal naptime for your child?
   i. Has your child previously been exposed to group care?

Think of other questions that might help create better beginnings for both families and early childhood programs.

3. Discuss routines with parents, such as the importance of arriving and departing at the same time each day.

4. Encourage parents to visit the center with their child before the first day.

5. Collect magazine articles that deal with separation anxiety that can be shared with parents. The transition is often easier for the parent after reading such material.

6. Encourage new parents to talk with other parents in the center who have been through similar circumstances.

7. Encourage parents to call the center to check on their child at any time.

8. Stress to parents the importance of saying “good-bye” to a child. Discourage parents from slipping out of class.

**Teacher’s role**

1. Talk with parents before the child begins school or child care. Discuss the type of activities you plan for the children and why you feel these activities are important. Ask parents what activities their child most enjoys?