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 you 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.
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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?

2. Be prepared for new children. Have their cubby labeled, let them know this is their space. Read information the director has received from parents. Talk with the director about new children.

3. Ask parents to bring pictures of family members. A bulletin board to put items such as this can be a special treat for both parents and children.

4. Create a “My New School” book of your classroom. Include pictures of teachers, children, activity areas, pets in the classroom ...

5. Be prepared to spend individual time with a new child throughout the day, especially upon arrival.

6. Invite parents to spend extra time in the center during the adjustment period.

Communication between the early childhood program and home is a vital key to building trusting relationships with families. As you enroll new children, think of how you can assist parents and children with this new experience.

And last, but not least, here are some steps parents can take to ease the separation anxiety. You might want to copy these and give to “prospective” parents.

Steps for Parents

1. Do your homework! Parents need to feel comfortable and secure about their choice for child care. Children will feel parents’ anxieties and feel anxious also. Therefore, parents need to visit centers and carefully evaluate them before making this important decision.

2. After choosing a center and the child is accepted, take him/her for a visit. This visit will be a time for your child to see activities and equipment; to meet the teachers and new friends. The parent-child visit should last 15-20 minutes. Notice lesson plans and daily schedules. Find out what teachers will be there when your child arrives and meet them.

4. Adding words to your “My New School” book will give meaning to this new environment.

5. Home visits are wonderful and can be great ice-breakers.

10. Have something special for new children – stickers, bows attached to a chair, their favorite toy ready to be played with.

11. Use group time to read books about children who are going to a new school.

12. Pre-school children may benefit from having a “buddy” assigned to them on the first day.
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3. Complete the paperwork, read your parent’s handbook, and meet with the director for an enrollment interview. Ask questions and share concerns. Establish open communication from the start with the staff and director.

4. Prepare your child for this new experience:
   a. Read books about going to day care.
   b. Talk about activities that he/she will be doing.
   c. Use teachers’ and directors’ names in conversation so the child will be familiar with these names.
   d. Accept and understand the child’s concerns.
   e. Act out the first day of school by role playing the events that will take place the first day.

5. Bring the child to visit for a few hours the morning before the first FULL day. This is an important step. It allows the child to have an introduction to the program. Tell the child you will return after “outside time” or whatever activity precedes your returning. Be sure to return on time. You may find a child who is not ready to leave!

6. The first day has finally arrived. Avoid rushing your child. Allow plenty of time for dressing, breakfast and other details. Remember the change of clothes. At the center, find a familiar teacher to leave your child with. Tell your child that you have to go to work and you will be back after “naptime” (or whatever activity is appropriate). Avoid lingering or sneaking away.

7. Remember that children adjust at their own pace. Some may adjust quickly and be fine. Some may adjust quickly and a week later decide they don’t want to go any more. This does not necessarily mean that there is a problem at the center. Ask questions. This can be a delayed reaction to the separation. Some children will take several weeks to adjust and then love it. Stay involved!

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