

First Day Fears

Dear Daycare Families,

Whether this is your child's first time in daycare or your child has been in daycare before, the first day can be a scary time for children (and some moms and dads too!). If your child is old enough to understand and is aware that he/she will be starting a new daycare then your child perhaps has also been thinking about the new change. Then, they walk in to a new place with new children, new grownups and new "stuff". Maybe Mom looks a little teary-eyed or worried... it's no wonder some children suddenly cling to parents or cry! It's completely natural for the both of you to feel this way!

When a parent departs, the child may feel nervous or anxious and may cry and protest. This is what psychologists call separation distress. It is a part of the normal development of establishing independence and autonomy. The intensity of a child's distress seems to depend mostly on the child's personality and temperament but can also depend on the manner in which adults handle the anxiety and in their departure.

Through experience I have found that it is in the child's best interest if the child is given a quick farewell hug and kiss, reminded that you will return and then followed by a quick exit. While there may be tears, prolonging your departure only creates more stress on the child. While sometimes a stressful departure cannot be avoided, you can however make it shorter. Children are resilient and adapt very quickly after an adult has gone and usually within minutes have begun to play.

Here are a few tips for getting through those first few days.

- Act confident. If you seem anxious and unsure, children pick up on that and start wondering if there really is something to worry about!
- If possible, plan on staying for 5 to 10 minutes the first day or two while your child settles. A longer or shorter amount of time may make separation harder.
- When it is time for you to leave, make sure you say goodbye. Trying to sneak out when the child is occupied can make kids panic later which can make separation more difficult the next day.
- Separation anxiety sometimes shows up on the second or third week even if no separation anxiety was present the first week. Don't worry! This is normal.

Please remember that I am a parent myself that has had to put a child in daycare before and I really do understand how hard this can be. I know that you are entrusting me with a very precious gift, the care of your child, and I feel very honored that I will be your child's daycare provider. If your child is having an especially hard time, I will give you a call at home or work so that we can discuss how to proceed.

Thank you. I'm looking forward to a great partnership!

Sincerely,

Marina V. Valenzuela