

Separation Anxiety



In a 3 or 4-year-old classroom, you may see children having a difficult time saying "good-bye" to family members who drop them off. This may be due to the child experiencing a school setting for the first time. Often times, young children will cry for short or even long periods of time, throw a temper tantrum or be upset throughout the day. Children may feel scared or unsure of their new environment and wary of new faces. As teachers, one of our goals is to help all of the children and their families feel welcome, comfortable and safe while in our care. Here are some tips to help you in supporting children that are having a difficult time saying "good-bye."

- Have the child visit the classroom prior to starting the program fulltime.
- Suggest ways that family members to talk to their child to help prepare them for school.
- Take pictures of the child with their family members to display in the classroom. You can also take a photo of a happy reunion of the child and family member at the end of the day. Display on a Velcro strip so that the child can carry the photo with them throughout the day.
- Offer soothing activities such as water play, sand play, play dough, painting, etc. Consider drop off at the playground. This will provide a positive focus for this transition.
- Reassure the child that their family will be back at the end of the day.

The Good-Bye Ritual

- Create a "good-bye" ritual that provides a bridge for the emotionally challenging experience of saying good-bye for both child and family.
- Remember each ritual will be individualized to the child's needs, age and family culture. Include families in creating the ritual by asking how they handle specific routines and emotionally challenging events.
- Ask families to inform you when they are ready to leave so that you can support their goodbye ritual.
- Inform family members to ALWAYS let their child know when they are leaving - even if they are going to cry. It's important for the child to know that their family is leaving rather than disappearing. Overtime, the ritual may change as the child adjusts and matures.

Rituals created collaboratively by families, child, and teachers strengthen the trust and relationship between all three.

Remember...

- * Separation can also be difficult for family members as well as for children.
- * Adults' experiences from their own childhood may influence their feelings about separation
- * Include books on separation in the library.

References:

You Go Away and You Come Back. Young Children 2004
Rituals and Routines. Young Children 2012