

Separation Anxiety and Transitions

Starting an Early Childhood program is a significant event. This may be the child's first step into the world outside their home or his first experience of having someone take care of him who is not part of his family. This could be a child's first experience in an early childhood program.

It is important to remember that the term anxiety is different from the term fear. Fear has a specific object or person attached to it whereas anxiety is objectless, referring to the unknown. If we say to a fearful child at the door of an early childhood room, "What are you afraid of?", it is impossible for the child to respond because there is no "what." Separation anxiety is a real fear for some children. There are many ways in which children express their anxiety, from simple clinging or acting quieter than usual, to tears or temper tantrums. The child is usually not alone in experiencing this anxiety. Almost always their significant adult also shares the anxiety which works subconsciously to create anxiety in the child.

Here are some messages we hope to convey to children as they begin our program.

- **You will be safe here.**
We will make sure that you are well-fed, well-rested, clean and safe. We will take care of both your physical and emotional needs. Your feelings will be respected. If you need to cry, we will offer listening, support and comfort.
- **You will be taken care of by a special person who you will get to know very well.**
Your special teacher will learn your communication style and you will learn hers. She will talk about your family and will help you when you are missing your family.
- **Every day your family will come to pick you up and take you home.**
There will be a predictable schedule that will help you to learn when you can expect to be picked up. Your teacher will let your family know all about your day at school.
- **Your family is welcome here too.**
Your family is an important part of this program. They might spend time here talking to your teachers or other families. We plan to have pictures of your family displayed where you can always see them.
- **There are lots of fun and interesting things to explore here, and you can choose what you want to play with.**
This is a place for you to explore when you are ready. There are things for you to play and learn with; there will be active and quiet activities for you; there will be things to do with friends and with teachers and things to do alone. When you are ready you will be able to make new friends.



Here are some guidelines to consider as children transition into our program.

- One week before school starts, say: “You are going to start school and meet new friends and have a lot of fun!”
- Go through the daily routine of who will be there and what things they will be doing.
- As the teachers assist children become engaged in an activity, your presence will be less vital. The staff has experience in helping to ease a child’s separation from their significant adult.
- Do not “slip away” as a way to deal with or avoid the pains of separating. If you are sneaky, children will learn that you can’t be trusted.
- State in an assured manner that you accept their feelings, but that you know they will be fine.
- When it time to leave, then leave. When you say “you will be fine” or return in response to crying, screaming, etc., the message you give the child is that there might be something to be afraid of.

Daily Transitions

Children in the Extended Day (Full Day) program might meet in a different room before 9am or after 4:30pm. In the mornings, place their belongings in their regular classroom. In the afternoons, their belongings will be in their regular classrooms. Remember to sign them in and out each day.