

Eleven Ways to Help with Good-byes

Note that these tips may not work for every child. Use them as guidelines to help establish what works best for you and your child.

Never leave without saying good-bye

Sneaking out is never a good idea. It will only serve to make your child more anxious about your leaving. In the long run it will possibly make your child cling to you more at all times and not just when you're saying good-bye.

Establish a good-bye routine and stick with it

Establishing a routine for saying good-bye will help your child to anticipate the good-bye. It is a good idea to give them some choice and control within the routine. For example: "Would you like to read Ernie Gets Lost or Grover Goes to School before I go?" (Don't overwhelm your child with choices and if the child can't make the choice, choose one.)

Remind the child of the routine and give a warning before you're ready to leave

Most children do better if they have some reminders about what is going to happen. You should talk to your child about saying good-bye on the way to school or while you're getting ready to leave in the morning. For example: "After we have breakfast, we'll read two books, then you can walk Mommy to the door and wave good-bye from the window. Sally will be with you and take good care of you all day."

Tell your child when you will return

Children learn about time based on the routines of the day. Be concrete and give a specific event that will let the child know when you will be seeing each other again. For example: "Daddy will pick you up after circle. We can read a book before we go home."

Do not prolong the good-bye

Once you have said good-bye, leave. This may be hard if your child is upset, but prolonging the good-bye will only make it harder on your child when you actually have to go.

Recognize and label your child's feelings

Children are learning about their emotions, and this is a good opportunity to help recognize and label their feelings. For example: "You're feeling really sad that Daddy is leaving. It's hard to say good-bye. I'll be back to pick you up right after circle. I'm going to miss you, too, but I know you'll have fun at school with your teachers and friends."

Let your child bring a special toy or stuffed animal from home

Most children have a special toy or stuffed animal that they use to comfort themselves when they are feeling sad. These transitional objects help children to feel connected to home and their parents. Stuffed toys and dolls seem to work best. Do not have children bring in anything fragile, small, or too large. Only one toy per day. Please check with your child's school regarding their policy on bringing toys from home.

Have family pictures for your child to look at throughout the day

Pictures of family and pets are of great comfort to children throughout the day. Children under two have a harder time conjuring up mental images of their family and pictures give them a visual reminder. To protect the pictures, you can put them in a small photo album or into small plastic frames on a ring. Some schools make family books or put family pictures in a child's cubby or on the wall.

Call your child on the phone or make a tape recording of yourself reading a story

Most children will appreciate a phone call or a story on tape that you have recorded. They will be reminded of you and comforted by the sound of your voice. You will have to work with your child's school and/or caregiver to determine whether this tip will work for your child. Again, check with your child's school regarding policy on phone calls.

Write a love note to your child

Write a note that the caregiver can read to your child at lunch or before nap. Your child will look forward to the note and it will be another reminder of you in the day.

Accentuate the positive

Remember to talk with your child about all the aspects of school that are fun. Too much talk about how hard leaving and saying good-bye can sometimes give children the idea that going to school is supposed to be hard. While you should never ignore a child's feelings, finding opportunities to talk about all the exciting activities at school will give your child a sense that you think that school is a great place to be. For example: "Yesterday your teacher told me you baked muffins. She said you got to add the flour. Remember how much fun that was? I wonder whether you will be cooking today?"

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