

SEPARATION STRATEGIES

Kidslink



Emma, age three, anxiously clings to her grandmother's leg; four-year-old Joey happily waves good-bye to his dad from the top of the climbing bars; feeling deserted, three-and-a-half-year-old Megan sobs and wraps her arms tightly around her teacher's neck. As these preschoolers enter their new learning environments, they must separate from familiar surroundings and people. How they handle this transition depends on their individual personalities, experiences, and ages. But for many preschoolers, making the adjustment from home to school can be stressful.



As children move from toddler groups to preschool, they may be overwhelmed by the idea of having to share a teacher with a greater number of peers. So, don't be surprised if some children revert to soothing behaviors - like thumb-sucking - that they've already outgrown. Be patient; such behaviors usually disappear as the child becomes more comfortable in his or her new setting.

DIFFERENT STYLES OF SEPARATING

Three-year-olds, with their developing verbal skills and continued dependence on adults for assistance, may cry or whine when it's time to tell their parents good-bye. Especially if this is their first school experience, threes may be dealing with some fears that feel very real to them. They may worry, for example, that Mom won't find them in their new place or the carpool parents will forget to pick them up. Playing with familiar props such as a "mommy" purse, "baby sister" doll, or "daddy" tie can help ease the home-school transition.

Fours, on the other hand, often readily assert their independence. Highly verbal and eager to voice their opinions, they make their dislikes clearly known, and may emphatically declare to their new caregiver, "I hate it here! I want to go home!" or "We didn't do it that way last year!" Discussion time can help this age group explore feelings and internalize new strategies.

Don't forget, too, that fours enjoy new challenges; adding extensions and new materials to last year's activities helps keep interest levels high.



EASING THE TRANSITION



Here are a few suggestions to help smooth the separation process:

- * "Meet Your Teacher" was an important event to begin the transition to the preschool. Spending time in the classroom with your child's teacher reduces first day anxieties. We also recommend that you talk about the entrance door where you will say goodbye when coming to preschool and where you will be waiting to greet your child after class.
- * On the first day of school, convey to your preschooler confidence in their ability to handle this new experience. Say good-bye and leave promptly! (Never linger or show apprehension or sadness that they are growing or that they will be away from you for awhile.)
- * Show excitement for their new adventure!

NEXT STEPS IF CHILD IS STILL EXPERIENCING DIFFICULT SEPARATION

- * Bring child to building entrance door – greet the teacher – give your child a goodbye hug/kiss and always say good-bye, never sneak out, and return when promised.
- * Have a good-bye ritual. Example: say hello to the teacher, hug, blow 3 good-bye kisses.
- * Remember teachers are standing by with an outreached hand to offer tender loving care to any child who needs extra help with separation. Let teachers help you. They have experience with this very common transitional concern.
- * Most children make the transition into preschool after a few weeks, can say easily good-bye and join their class.
- * We may deal with separation anxiety on and off throughout the year but remember this is a marking milestone before Kindergarten!

TEACHERS WILL:

- * warmly welcome your child
- * understand that being separated from your child can be an emotional journey for parents, too!
- * give emotional support for parents and children
- * hug and reassure child
- * provide places for children to find comfort
 - ~ fun learning centers
 - ~ dolls for hugging
 - ~ spend some time near the teacher if they are struggling
- * validate preschoolers feelings, letting them know it's okay to be sad or homesick
- * encourage friendships and help children find activities they enjoy together
- * **CALL PARENT IF CHILD REMAINS UPSET AND ANXIOUS AND CANNOT BE TRANSITIONED INTO THE GROUP!**

You are always welcome to call the Kidslink Office if your child is experiencing separation anxiety when you drop them off. We are happy to check in on your child and let you know how they're doing.