

Some Thoughts for a Positive Separation

Separation is a process. There is much the adults in a child's life can do to facilitate this process. Most importantly, we must accept each child's timetable. There are no predictors that can reliably indicate how much time a child will need to adjust to a classroom setting; however, recognizing a child's temperament and social history can be helpful. Has the child had any previous group experiences, such as music class, library readings, or playgroup? Is the child accustomed to being with caregivers? Does the child *jump* into new activities or do they generally observe first? To best support a child's adjustment to the classroom we must acknowledge their previous experiences and temperament.

Since it is the first time many children enter the community outside the home, most parents have mixed emotions when their child begins school. However, it is important that parents present school in a positive light to their child. The message must be that school is a safe place to play and make friends. Parents must express confidence in the teachers' ability to take good care of the child. If parents have any doubts they should discuss them with the teacher. A group setting does require some compromises. The child will need to adapt to the classroom schedule and routines. However because of their expertise, teachers are able to meet each child's needs.

At home parents can read books about school to their child. Reading together provides a forum for discussing any questions the child might have about school. The ability to separate is a skill and, as with other skills, practice is helpful. At home, parents can play act saying *good-bye* and then returning with their child. This can begin with a simple game of peek-a-boo. A parent can also say good-bye and return from another room inside the home. Another possibility is to play act with props, such as puppets or teddy bears. Baby Bear can say good-bye to Mama Bear as she gives her a hug. Mama Bear can promise to return. Mama Bear and Baby Bear will then happily reunite. The goal is to provide the child with *successful* separation experiences.

While in the classroom the parent should adopt as passive a role as possible. Encourage the child to ask the teacher for assistance. Nevertheless, it is important to read the child's cues and to reassure them as needed. Sometimes it can be helpful if someone other than the person the child is most attached to brings them to school. Gradually, the teacher can gain the child's trust as they begin to have positive interactions. Classroom activities are so inviting that given time, the desire to be part of the classroom experience will overcome the anxiety the child might have about separation.