

Seven Ways to Ease the Transition to Child Care

This is a dilemma which most working parents face. Even those of us who love our jobs and get to "choose" to work feel the pull of separation from our children. There are many variables here including the age of your child, the type and quality of care he is in and the total hours he is in care. The other variable is how much and what kind of time you get to spend with your child when he is not in care. In general, we encourage a parent to stay home as long as possible with a new baby. Here are some things you can do to make this transition, as well as the time your child spends in child care optimal.

- Ensure that you have quality child care.** It is crucial to your child's success in childcare that you choose quality care for your child. Knowing your child is well taken care of will also give you confidence and peace of mind.



- Communicate** with your child's caregiver. Daily two-way communication with your child's caregiver will give you a chance to share information about your child and family, and will give the caregiver a chance to tell you about your child's day. If your child was crying when you left, you can ask how long he cried, how the caregiver responded, and what he did the rest of the day. Many programs provide daily written, as well as verbal communication with parents.

- Allow for warming-in time.** When you begin your child in care it is important to give him a chance to get to know his new environment and caregivers. You can visit together at least a couple of times before he begins. You may also want to start your child in care for a shorter period of time, which gradually increases to the full care you need. Once your child begins care, it is important that you also allow enough time so that you don't have to do a rushed good-bye in the morning. Many parents like to read a book with their child or to sit with their child for a few minutes before saying good-bye in the morning.

- Say good-bye.** Sometimes parents are tempted to sneak out without saying good-bye, hoping that the child can avoid his morning tears and go on happily with his day. In fact, children always discover that the parent is gone and then have to deal with feelings of confusion, as well as feelings of sadness. Letting your child know that you can be trusted to say good-bye when you leave, will ultimately help his successful transition to childcare.

- Leave your child a memento.** Young children love to have reminders of their parents when their parents aren't there. Leave a picture of you for the caregiver to put on the wall or for your child to keep in his cubby or backpack. An infant or toddler might enjoy a scarf or shirt of yours to keep until you return.

- Spend special time together.** Often working parents have to juggle complicated lives after they pick up children from childcare. This harried pace can interfere with giving children the kind of focused and attentive time they need after a long separation. Take a serious look at your schedule so that you can make spending time with your child after work a priority. Building this kind of close time into your day will help your child feel calmer in childcare and enable you to feel more fulfilled as a parent.

- Think about your child's tears.** It is natural for both you and your child to feel some sadness when you are apart from each other. And crying is a healthy expression of that sadness. Just because saying good-bye is sad for both of you doesn't mean that you don't enjoy your separate time.

While most children experience some tears when they begin child care, it is important to monitor how much and how long your child is crying. Prolonged crying may indicate that your child care situation is not a good match for your child or that your child needs more transition time. Normally, it takes a child a few weeks to adapt to child care. A child may cry off and on for an hour or more the first few days and after that, it should decrease. If your child is continuing to cry for long periods of time after the first couple of weeks, it is important to reassess his situation.