



Easing Into Center Life

A young child's first experience in a group setting is an important milestone for the child. It is also a special experience for parents.

You play a critical role in helping your child adjust to a center program. In fact, your behavior and feelings probably constitute the most critical factor in helping your child make the adjustment.

The most common difficulty experienced at first by parents and children is separation anxiety. It is usually easier when you are prepared for it. Children need time to adjust and ways to demonstrate their adjustment process.

The following suggestions are offered as guidelines for the important task of helping your child become happy and comfortable here.

- Recognize that your child needs time to become comfortable with the new environment and accept that it may take longer than you would like. Expect some crying and clinging; with some children this does not happen initially, but it will come later as a delayed reaction.
- Prepare your child by talking positively about this new experience. Say, "While I am at work, you can play and have fun with the children." Play to visit the center with your child before he or she begins. Stay only 15-20 minutes.

- Avoid talking about your child while he or she is present.
- Above all, get to know the people who are working in the center and communicate with them frequently. Be an involved parent! Parents are encouraged to drop in anytime.
- Try to allow enough time to avoid rushing. Children go into slow motion when they are rushed. They need time in the morning to get settled before you leave; when leaving in the afternoon, they need time to complete whatever they are doing. Give your attention to your child at this time.
- On the other hand, avoid lingering too long in the morning during this adjustment period. It is important for your child to comprehend that you really are going to leave and will return in due time. Crying is often an expression of reluctance to let you leave rather than actual fear or anxiety related to the center, and lingering may imply to the child that you do not really have to go.