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HOME
SOCIETY OF
CALIFORNIA

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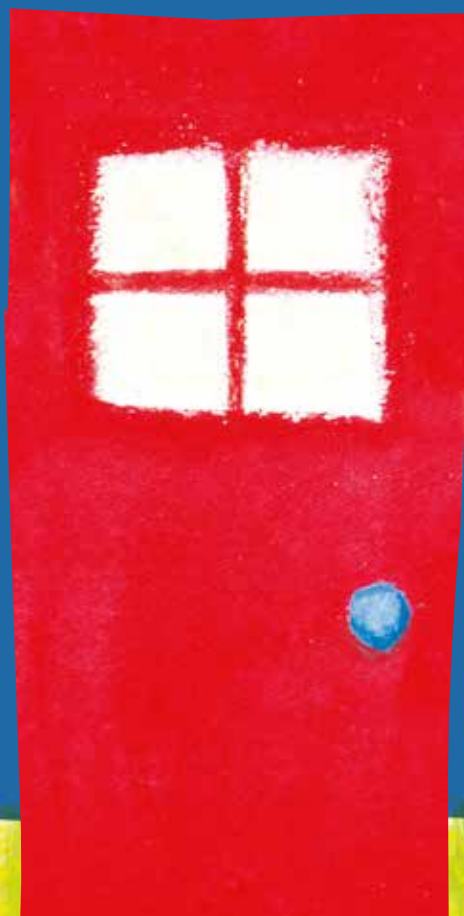
C H I L D R E N ' S H O M E S O C I E T Y O F C A L I F O R N I A

SEPARATION

EASING THE TRANSITION FROM HOME TO CHILD CARE



A new caregiving situation can be challenging for both parent and child, but with some time and preparation, parents and caregivers can work together to ease the transition from home to child care.



An all too typical scene on the first day of a new caregiving situation is a frightened child in tears, clinging to a parent or caregiver's leg. Parents often feel embarrassed or confused about what to do next. They may feel a mix of strong emotions: either sympathetic or angry toward the child for their behavior, guilty for leaving the child, or perhaps questioning what they have "done wrong" since everyone else's child seems to be adjusting so easily!

Separation is a developmental challenge. When adults take children's feelings seriously, talk to them honestly, and give them lots of understanding support, children can learn ways to cope with separation successfully both now and in the future.



★ DIFFERENT AGES, DIFFERENT NEEDS ★

Some behaviors are common for certain ages. Recognizing them can help you understand what is happening and why.

AGE	DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE	WHAT YOU CAN DO
Birth to 8 Months	Although infants recognize the voice, face, smell, and caregiving style of a parent, as long as their needs are being met, they can easily be comforted by another caregiver.	A new caregiver may not immediately be able to read a baby's unique cues for attention, diaper changes, and hunger. The caregiver can observe the baby with the parent to learn as much as possible about how the child communicates.
8 Months to 2 Years	During this stage of development, it is normal to see separation anxiety. Children may become frightened and upset when their parent leaves, or when they see unfamiliar adults.	A calm voice reminding children that mommy or daddy always comes back can help ease fears. Transitional objects such as a special blanket or soft, snuggly toy can help ease anxiety.
2 to 5 Years	Young children usually handle separation fairly well, but life stresses like a new sibling, illness, changes in the family, or a new caregiver can trigger separation anxiety.	Sometimes children cope by regressing to earlier behavior like tantrums, thumb sucking, or baby talk. Reading children's books with separation themes can start conversations that help children cope with their feelings.

★ TIPS TO EASE SEPARATION ★

- To build trust, always tell your child the truth — that you are leaving, but you will be back. Don't disappear without notice. Sneaking out does not build trust! Say: "I am going to work and I will come back to get you after your nap" (choose any time, and label it with the name of the activity it corresponds to in the child's schedule).
- Stay calm and show confidence in your child, but get help if needed. Ask your child, "Can you say goodbye to me by yourself, or do you need (name of caregiver) to help you?"
- Develop a special goodbye ritual that you and your child share at every separation. It should be short, pleasant, and loving. Be consistent.
- Always talk to your child about the happy experiences to expect in the new situation. Help your child look forward to a favorite activity or person.
- Keep a brief schedule of your child's activities or discuss your child's day with the caregiver as time permits. Use that information to reinforce the good times as you talk to your child. Instead of asking, "What did you do in school today?" try, "Who did you sit next to during snack?" This can start an entire conversation about your child's day.
- Prepare your child for a new separation. Before the first day, make a short visit and request a facility tour. Show your child where their belongings will go (adding a photograph with their name can be a helpful reminder), play area, outside area, where the bathrooms are, and where they will nap.
- When your child's first day arrives, be prepared for your own separation anxiety. Once you have said goodbye, leave. Prolonging your goodbye only makes things harder. If you are concerned about your child during the day, call the caregiver. Most parents discover that all was well shortly after their departure.
- Help your child choose a special item from home to bring to child care if it is permitted. Often, a blanket, a snuggly toy, or a familiar photograph extends the feeling and security of home to the new and unfamiliar setting. For example, a "blankie" is a tactile comfort item that smells, feels, and looks like home.
- Watch for your child's individual expressions of anxiety — wetting pants, thumb sucking, or other behavior changes. Patience and understanding from parents and caregivers will help your child cope with their feelings.
- Be prepared for separation anxiety to appear after a seemingly painless initial adjustment. (Many caregivers and educators call this response "Second Week-itis.") It occurs because your child is now comfortable enough to show their true feelings.

Establishing a positive relationship between parent and caregiver makes separating easier.



TO LEARN MORE

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

THE KISSING HAND

Audrey Penn, illustrated by Ruth E. Harper & Nancy M. Leak

THE PIGEON HAS TO GO TO SCHOOL

words and pictures by Mo Willems

THE RUNAWAY BUNNY

Margaret Wise Brown, illustrated by Clement Hurd

BOOKS FOR ADULTS

BECOMING THE PARENT YOU WANT TO BE

Laura Davis & Janis Keyser

CARING FOR YOUR BABY AND YOUNG CHILD

American Academy of Pediatrics/Steven P. Shelov, M.D., M.S., F.A.A.P.

