



Secrets to More Cheerful Good-byes



No parent wants to leave a crying toddler with a babysitter or an upset five-year-old at the classroom door. Emotional separations tug at everyone's heartstrings. But there are a few secrets to making these transitions smoother and less dramatic for everyone involved.

Reality Check: The first thing to recognize is that facing new environments, new teachers, new kids, and new schedules is a big adjustment for the whole family. Normal responses range from tearful good-byes to kids who skip away with barely a backward glance. But daily separations become predictable, and over time they become easier. When kids are well taken care of by others, trust is built, and the world becomes a safer place.

Respond with Understanding: It takes an extra helping of patience to be



kind and calm when kids are extra needy and clingy. But chances are, you may need to take a deep breath and calm yourself down, too. Be honest. "I'll miss you, too. But when I see you again, we'll have fun talking about our day." Feeling secure is key when kids are leaving the familiar for a new experience, and we sometimes underestimate smiles, hugs, and kind words.

Walk Them Through: Talk about what children can expect. This seems so simple, but realistically they might not understand what this new situation will look like. It's tempting to oversell any new experience by making it sound like a day at Disneyland, but the best tactic is to walk them through the day. If a first day of school is being anticipated, talk about meeting new children, playing with fun toys, reading books, playing outside on the playground, and having snacks and lunch. Whenever you can, familiarize children with the new situation ahead of time. Meet a new babysitter before the first time they're left alone with that person, or visit a new classroom and teacher before the first day of school.

Good-bye Rituals: Agreeing on a good-bye ritual is very helpful for most families. Do you have a special "See

ya later alligator" type of saying, a special hug, a high-five, or a kiss you always share? Rituals are reassuring to children. It's not a good idea to sneak away, even if children are happily playing. Let them know you're leaving, and as part of the good-bye, make a meaningful reference to when you'll see them again—after snack, lunch or naptime, or after school is over. Toddlers and preschoolers aren't old enough to keep an eye on the clock. A reference to activities makes more sense to them than saying, "I'll pick you up at 3."

Experts say that our attitudes about separations are developed early. For some kids, a transition object from home such as a stuffed toy or a snapshot helps form a connection between home and school. And never underestimate the power of a good book to help teach healthy attitudes and soothe kids during separations. Read a book together, such as *The Kissing Hand* by Audrey Penn, for an extra helping of cuddle time.

PERSONAL PARENTING

Post-it-Note Fun

- Toddlers enjoy pulling off the pages of these little notepads one by one. They can also stick the notes onto a cookie sheet and then “magically” take them off again. It's a good workout for small muscles.

- Older children can make a tiny book from Post-it notes. They can draw pictures and designs on the notes, or they can create a tiny sticker book by placing one sticker on each page. When finished, place the self-adhesive edges of



the notes one on top of the other and turn the pages! The pages may also be stapled together.

- Draw faces on the Post-it notes and then wrap them around a finger for a paper puppet. Make a whole family, and deck them out with craft feathers, bits of fabric, and sequins.

Lost-and-Found Trick

When your kids lose track of something, do you jump in and find it for them? When kids can't find their library book, their shoe, lunch, or backpack, you have the perfect opportunity for teaching them the skill of backtracking. Instead of asking, “Have you looked under the bed or in the closet?” ask children to think when and where they last had the missing item. Back-

tracking gives them a chance to use their memory and problem-solving skills.



What Is A Learning Disability?

The National Center for Learning Disabilities (LD.org) explains learning disabilities this way:

“LD is more than a difference or difficulty with learning—it is a neurological disorder that affects the brain's ability to receive process, store, and respond to information. This Web site offers support for families and educators, and offers hundreds of publications on a variety of topics. It features the latest research and also keeps parents up-to-date on what's happening on Capitol Hill. The site also has a blog and lots of ideas on how parents can support their children and take care of themselves, too.”

Fast, Fun Fingerfood!

- Cut a sandwich into small squares or triangles.
- Place frozen peas in a paper cup.
- Serve blueberries in an ice-cream cone.
- Chop broccoli, cucumbers, or tomatoes into small pieces and serve with a dip.



Take Good Care of “Baby Teeth”

Children start to lose their primary or “baby” teeth: between the ages of five and seven. However, just because these teeth will be replaced by permanent teeth doesn't mean they can be neglected. The American Dental Association recommends that a dentist examine a child within six months after the first tooth comes in and no later than the first birthday.

Most children have a full set of 20 primary teeth by the time they are three years old.

- ✓ Make sure your child's toothbrush is an appropriate size for his or her mouth. Adult brushes are too big to get into the small places in a child's mouth.
- ✓ Remember to change toothbrushes every three months, and it's smart to replace them if your child has had the flu, a bad cold, or a sore throat.
- ✓ Learn about proper brushing and flossing techniques from your dentist.



Early Writing Development: The Process

Children put their marks on paper with crayons, pencils, markers, chalk, and paints. This first writing is scribbling. Scribbling is to writing what babbling is to talking.

When children develop a new skill, they learn it in specific developmental patterns. They babble before forming their first word. They crawl, stand, and hold on to furniture before taking their

first step. They ride tricycles before graduating to bikes. When children learn to write, each scribble, invented letter, and spelling pattern is an important part of the writing process.



Scribble Writing

Scribbling is the first pre-writing step and it's important. Very young children may scribble just to see the colors on the page. But as they develop, those scribbles become meaningful. As the small muscles in their hands and fingers get stronger, children write up and down and around. As control develops, shapes begin to emerge such as circles, ovals, and squares. Eventually children begin to understand that the scribble is supposed to mean something and that writing is a way to communicate. When your child comes up to you and asks what the writing says, a good answer is, "What does it mean to you?"

Invented letters

A child's scribble writing eventually begins to resemble letters and symbols. Some of the letters may even be written from left to right, indicating the child understands the writing process. These symbols or invented letters will tell a story to the child. With their scribbles and lines mixed together, these invented letters start to look more like real letters than scribbles. At first they may be scattered all around the page, but they evolve into strings of letters and symbols.

Invented Spelling and Random Letters.

As children continue to develop their writing ability, the awareness of letter sounds brings children to a new form of writing. Invented spelling is related to the sounds the children hear in the words they are trying to write. At the beginning of this stage, children may write one letter--usually the initial consonant sound, to represent the whole word. For example, the letter *K* may represent the word *cake*. As children mature in the writing process, more sounds are represented in each word, so that *cake* becomes *kak*. Often, random strings of letters are formed that are meaningless to you as the parent but are very important to the child.

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Encourage writing by allowing children to express themselves through art and drawing. Provide a variety of paper, crayons, chalk, and markers. Writing is a complex process and is largely discovered by children through practice. And remember that children develop at their own pace and that each time they make a mark on a page, they're moving toward spelling a word correctly, writing a sentence, and eventually writing their first story.