



Why Are Good-Byes So Hard? Separations in the Toddler Years

Toddlers can have a hard time separating from parents and parents can have just as much separation anxiety! Parents and toddlers who are very connected may have a hard time letting go. For toddlers, being apart from their “secure base” can be very scary, and they can actively protest. Parents can have an especially hard time leaving when their child is so upset. And if parents feel guilty about leaving or are anxious about child care arrangements, good-byes can be even harder!

Tips for a “Good” Good-bye

1. Prepare Your Child.

Let your child know that today is a child care day or that you will be leaving. Let your child know when you will be back in a way that your toddler understands. (“I’ll be home to kiss you good night.”)

2. Be OK About Leaving.

If you are upset about saying good-bye, you may communicate that to your child without meaning to. Don’t ignore your child’s distress, but be upbeat and reassuring.

3. Establish a Ritual for Leaving.

A goodbye story, a hug for every hour apart, your toddler gets to open and close the door—choose a routine that is comforting and gives your child some control.

4. Use a Comforting object.

Have your toddler’s favorite stuffed animal, a picture of you, or a blanket available for your toddler.

5. Leave.

After your good-bye ritual, don’t prolong the discomfort by lingering. Say your good-byes, and then really leave.

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