Mommy, Don’t Go!

When a child goes to child care it may be the first time that child has been away from his parents. It can be hard for a child when a parent leaves, even if it’s only for a few hours. But each child is different. Some will come, tell their parents, “Good-bye,” and they’re ready to start playing. Others cry and hang on their parents when it’s time for them to leave.

Parents and child care providers need to work together to help children who are having trouble leaving their parents.

Things Parents Can Do

- Before a child begins care, have the parent bring the child for a visit. Tell the parent he should plan to stay with the child, not drop him off and leave for the day. During this time, talk with the child about what children do while they are in your care, let him meet the other children, and show him the toys. He may want his parent to play with him. That’s ok.

- Parents may want to find some books about going to child care in their local library. Reading to children is a good way to help them know what to expect, so they aren’t so afraid of going to a new place.

- Say, “Good-bye,” to their child before leaving. Don’t let parents sneak out the door while a child is playing. Sneaking out teaches children that parents may leave at any time.

- Help children and parents to find a special way to say their good-byes. This could include waving at the parent from a window, letting the child shut the door as the parent goes out, saying a special verse together such as, “See you later alligator...after while crocodile”, or other ideas that will work for both parents and children.

- Say a special good-bye, then leave. It’s hard on both parents and children when a parent says, “Good-bye,” over and over again to a crying child.

- Come on time to pick up their child. Even though a child may not be able to tell time on a clock, she will learn when a parent comes for her. Children worry and get upset when a parent is late.
Things Child Care Providers Can Do

• Have children bring something special, such as a stuffed animal or favorite blanket, from home. A child may want to hold that special toy when he’s feeling sad.

• Have children bring pictures of their family. Hang the pictures on a bulletin board or on the refrigerator where children can see them. When a child is missing a parent, it can be helpful for him to visit that parent by looking at a picture.

• Find out what the child likes to do. Have this toy or activity ready when the child comes so she can get started with something she likes.

• If a child is sad or crying, tell her what you think she’s feeling. “It’s sad for you when Mommy goes to work. Mommy will come back for you.” Some children will need to hear, “Mommy will come back for you,” over and over again during the day.

• Nap times and eating times may be hard for a child because they remind her of home. Ask the child’s parents what happens at home during these times. Some children like quiet music, to read a story, or to cuddle before they take a nap. Try to do the things the child is used to doing at home.

• Even though most young children can’t tell time on a clock, they can tell time by knowing what activities are planned in the day. Children will soon know that it’s time for free play when they arrive, lunch is served after reading books, and naptime follows lunch. Keeping a plan of activities helps children to know when it’s time for parents to come. You can say to a child, “After we play outside, Mommy will come to pick you up.”

• Understand that some children will need help many times during the day until they get used to being with you and away from their parents.

Tell children often, “Mommy will come back for you.”

Resource books:

• Helping Your Child Overcome Separation Anxiety or School Refusal: A Step by Step Guide for Parents by Andrew R. Eisen, Linda B. Engler, and Joshua D. Sparrow

• Secure Relationships: Nurturing Infant/Toddler Attachment in Early Care Settings by Alice Sterling Honig

• Separation: Supporting Children in Their Preschool Transitions (revised edition) by Kathe Jervis and Barbara K. Polland

• So This Is Normal Too? (2nd edition) by Deborah Hewitt

Children’s books:

• Bye-Bye Time by Elizabeth Verdick

• I Love You All Day Long by Francesca Rusackas

• Llama Llama Misses Mama by Anna Dewdney

• The Invisible String by Patrice Karst

• The Kissing Hand by Audrey Penn

• When I Miss You by Cornelia Maude Spelman

• Will You Come Back for Me? by Ann Tompert

Websites:

• KidsHealth.org – parent page

• PBS.org – parent page

• Scholastic.com – parent page