Greetings & Departures

A Publication of the Environments Professional Group

The everyday routines of coming together and separating occur at least twice a day in child care programs as children are brought in the mornings and picked up at the end of the day. These times are often stressful times of the day for everyone concerned – children, parents, and caregivers.

For infants who do not comprehend the concepts of time or object permanence, there may be a fear that the adults in their lives are not coming back. Even as preschool age children begin to understand these concepts, there may still be fears about leaving the security of home and family. For custodial adults and parents, there can be feelings of guilt and regret about not being with their child or concern for what might happen in their absence. Caregivers and staff may feel the stress of unhappy children or parents and the disorder of people coming and going. At the end of the day, everybody may be tired and not at their best. These times require some special thought and organization to make them more pleasant for all concerned.

Prepare Children & Families for Child Care

There are several important steps that can be taken 

- Meet the family and the child before the child enters the child care program. If possible, make a home visit to briefly introduce yourself and provide a program overview.

- Encourage parents, if at all possible, to introduce their child gradually into the child care setting. Invite parents to come and stay for a first short visit. Arrange several visits by the child that gradually increase in length before the child is left for a full day.

- Ask the parents to bring a special blanket or toy from home to help their child feel more connected to family while in the new child care setting.

- Ask parents to share information that may help keep continuity between home and child care. Serving a familiar food, reading a favorite book, or singing a familiar song can bring comfort to a child.
Set the Stage
Set the stage for happy hellos and good-byes by arranging a welcoming, organized entry area near the doorway. Include furnishings and accessories that invite busy parents to slow down for a more relaxed departure. Consider the following helpful suggestions.

- Place a comfortable chair and table nearby to enable a parent to sit and help remove a child’s coat or to spend a few quiet moments together with the child.
- Label individual lockers and cubbies, and make them easily accessible for storage of children’s personal belongings.
- Put a message center in the entry where caregivers can share information with parents about health issues, menus, and other center happenings.
- Include home-like accessories in the area – plants, photographs of children with their families, and displays of children’s artwork.
- Daily first impressions are important. Make sure the room is clean and organized every morning. This builds the confidence and trust of parents.
- An orderly entry makes for orderly transition times. But make sure that parents also know they are welcome in their child’s primary care area.

Establish the Routines
Establish a thoughtful, well-organized routine for greeting children and parents and saying good-bye. The value of a smiling, caring staff member available to greet and say good-bye to everyone – calling them by name – cannot be overestimated. Everyone should come and go with a few friendly words. Talking with families both at the beginning and the end of the day provides an opportunity to share information and also builds trusting relationships. Here are a few more tips to organize greetings and good-byes.

- Attach a pen to the sign-in log. It saves time, and the frustration of searching for a pen is avoided.
- Place written information about children’s days (when they napped, what they ate, information about medication, diapering, or toileting) in individual cubbies. This does not take the place of talking to parents but saves the caregiver from shuffling through papers and ensures that the information is passed on.
- Preplan and make choices of activities available for children to engage in at the busiest times. The first child to arrive and the last child to leave need to have something appropriate to do. Children should never have to sit and wait.
Help Children Transition
Help child transition from home to center and back to home. Greet children when they enter, but give them time to say good-bye to family before inviting them to join the group. At the end of the day, give children a few minutes to finish what they are doing or the activity they are involved in before helping them get their belongings ready to go home. Here are a few more hints for easy transitions.

- There is security in the known. Establish daily routines for arrival and departure. This may include a special greeting or an established sequence in the way children move into and out of the group.

- Acknowledge children’s feelings as real, and allow children to express them. Be sensitive to the fact that reaction to separation by individual children may vary from day to day.

- Provide opportunities throughout the day for children to safely act out their feelings. Talking on play telephones, playing with dolls and puppets in dramatic play situations, writing letters and drawing pictures, and telling stories about family members all provide outlets for expressing separation anxiety.

- Make a point of communicating something positive about every child at the end of the day – to the child and to the parent. This helps the child feel cared for and the parent feel more connected. It also reminds the caregiver about the value of each child.

Help Parents Develop Skills
Help parents develop skills to ease separation times. Encourage them to allow enough time at the beginning and ending of the day for children to transition from one environment to the next without rushing. Here are a few more hints for helping parents.

- Discourage parents from “slipping out” when they bring their children. Encourage them to always say good-bye before leaving.

- Assist parents in establishing their own special routines for arrival and departure – a special hug for the child, blowing a kiss, or their own hello/good-bye sayings.

- Help parents tune into their child’s cues. Some children do better with a brief good-bye while others may need for parents to linger longer. Parents, who often have their own concerns, may need help understanding their child’s cues. Make suggestions respectfully, keeping in mind the parent’s position in the child’s life.

- Recognize that adults – as well as children – may have difficulty with separation times. Try to acknowledge everyone’s feelings – parent’s feelings as well as children’s feelings.
Understand that there are as many feelings about separation as there are people involved. The character of greetings and departures can vary from day to day as emotions and moods fluctuate. A child who usually comes in happy may cry for a week. Or a parent who has been pleased and helpful may become anxious. Remain flexible and sensitive to individual needs as well as varying situations, and greetings and departures will become pleasant, meaningful daily routines.