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## How to help your child separate from you

*Janna Hack, infant mental health consultant*

Every child is unique in how they handle separation from their parents. Some children have a more difficult time and may cry, cling to you or exhibit some other behavior to indicate they are not happy about you leaving. This is sometimes difficult for parents, but it can be common. Below are some ideas to help make separation easier for you and your child; for example, when dropping them off at day care.

- Talk to her about it ahead of time. Use pictures or sing songs to help her understand.
- Visit the new place he will be going ahead of time. Let him meet the new caregiver.
- If possible, stay for awhile in the new place to allow your child time to adjust.
- Let her bring along something familiar from home (blanket, pacifier, scarf, picture, stuffed animal, etc.), or pick out a special toy together for her to take with her.
- Tell him when you are leaving and when you will return (e.g., "Mommy is leaving now but I will be back when you wake up from your nap.")
- When you leave her, give a quick hug and kiss and cheerfully say goodbye. Don't come back several times or prolong the goodbye. Don't try to sneak out.
- Do not bribe him to keep them from being upset.
- Let her see you talking to the new caregiver. Talk positively about that person with the child to bridge that trust.
- Develop a goodbye ritual.

### **Ideas for goodbye rituals**

- Use this technique from *The Kissing Hand*\*: Plant a kiss on her palm as a way of leaving a part of you with her during the day.
- Laminate a picture of yourself that he can carry with him, or make a small photo album that he can show his teachers.
- Play a goodbye game: Make 10 cards, each showing a picture of lips and a parent hugging a child. Each card is numbered from 1 to 10. Every morning before school, let the child choose a card to indicate how many kisses and hugs she will get from mommy or daddy at the end of the day.
- Give an especially big hug, wave from the window, blow a kiss, or develop a special saying or rhyme.
- Make a tape recording of you saying something comforting or singing a song that he can listen to if he feels distressed.
- When you say goodbye say, "I am going to miss you." Say goodbye to her head, arms, fingers, etc. with a gentle touch and a loving tone and facial expression.

\*Penn, Audrey. *The Kissing Hand*. Arlington, VA: Child & Family Press, 1993.