

Caring and Teaching

Caring and teaching involves not only managing hellos and good-byes, but also helping children feel connected to their families during the day. The more comfortable children feel in your care, the better they are able to cope with these times of the day.

Your Own Views

- Do you say hello and good-bye to each child and family member every day? What messages do you think your hellos and good-byes (or lack of them) send?
- What do you think about a child who cries a lot when his parents say good-bye? How does his crying make you feel? Do you feel differently about a child who never cries at drop-off time?
- What might explain some parents' attempts to leave without saying good-bye? What are they feeling? How do you feel when parents leave that way? How do the children feel?
- How do you help parents reunite with their children at the end of the day? How does a parent feel when her child cries or keeps playing? How do you feel?

Supporting Children and Families During Hellos and Good-Byes

Hellos and good-byes offer opportunities to build positive, trusting relationships with children and families. Families have different ways of approaching separations and reunions. In some cultures, people believe that very young children should be able to function separately from their families. Other people believe that a mother should never be separated from her infant. As you work with families, try to get to know each family's beliefs and values so that you can support them during hellos and good-byes. Here are some ideas.

Allow sufficient time for hellos and good-byes, to meet individual needs without rushing. For example, a child with a disability may need extra time to adjust. A child learning English as a second language may be comforted by your speaking a few words or singing a simple song in her home language. A child who usually transitions easily may need extra comforting on a particular day.

Spend time with each child and his or her family before the child is left in your care for the first time. As parents get to know you, they will feel more confident about leaving their child in your care. Children will feel more comfortable when they see you interacting positively with their families.

Arrange a transitional period with families. Children need time to get to know you and to feel comfortable in their new setting while a family member is present. Let families know this so they can take the time to ease their child into your program. However, understand that the job situations and other responsibilities of family members may not allow them to stay, even though they would like to do so.

Have families leave something that clearly belongs to them at the program. An object that belongs to a family member is a reminder to the child that his mother or father will be back. The parent might say to the child, “I’m leaving the book I’m reading with you. Will you keep it with your things so we can get it when I pick you up?”

Stay with the child and talk about her feelings if she is upset. When a child has difficulty saying good-bye, it is tempting to rush through the process or to distract the child while a family member leaves. However, doing so might lead the child to distrust you and may make separation even more difficult. You want the child to know that you understand how she feels and that you will help her manage her feelings.

Participate in the rituals that children and families develop. Be available to hold an infant after her mother kisses her on both cheeks and the top of her head. Walk a toddler to the window to wave good-bye and blow kisses. Rituals help children—and adults—feel more secure, because they know what to expect.

Reassure families after a difficult departure. Try to call or e-mail family members during the day to let them know that their child is fine and to explain what you did to comfort the child after they left. This kind of communication is reassuring and builds trust.



Supporting Children Emotionally Throughout the Day

When good-byes are over and children are in your care, they often miss their families and ask about them. An infant might be cranky without an obvious reason. A toddler might ask, “Go home?” only 10 minutes after his father left. There is no reason to ignore or distract children from thinking about their families during the day. In fact, helping children feel connected to their families makes them feel more comfortable in your program. Here are some other things you can do to support children emotionally.

Make daily routines an important part of each day. When children learn that they can depend on consistent routines, it gives them a sense of security that enables them to cope better with separation.

Offer experiences that allow children to express and manage their feelings about hellos and good-byes. Respect children’s feelings and provide soothing activities. Music can calm a child’s anxiety and make her want to dance. Singing, exploring sand and water, and playing with stuffed animals and dolls are all experiences that help children manage their feelings.

Encourage play that helps children master separating and reuniting. Play games such as peek-a-boo. Offer other opportunities for children to appear and disappear, such as by playing in tunnels, cardboard boxes with doors that open and close, or tents made by draping a blanket over a table. Provide props for toddlers and twos, such as hats, briefcases, cloth bags, and empty food boxes. Encourage them to pretend that they are leaving for work or the store and coming home again. Toddlers and twos also enjoy playing hide-and-seek.

Read books with children about separations and reunions. Books such as *Are You My Mother? (¿Eres tu mi mamá?)*, by P. D. Eastman, and *The Runaway Bunny*, by Margaret Wise Brown, can help children understand separation and reunion as they hear about the experiences of others. In the first book, a little bird falls from the nest and asks everyone, “Are you my mother?” until he finally finds her. In the second book, a bunny plays an imaginary game of hide-and-seek with his mother. He imagines that he will run away, and she assures him that she will always find him. Also consider writing your own books.

Recognize that children are competent. Children sense when you have confidence in their ability to separate from family members and function well. Your interactions with them help children recognize their own abilities.

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