

Saying Good-Bye



knowing that it probably won't persist into adulthood is a relief.

Your child's church teachers work hard to make that anxious time of dropping off a child as easy as possible. By greeting every child with a smile, offering a toy, or distracting with a song or activity, good teachers help preschoolers cope with transitions. What can you as a parent do to make saying good-bye a little easier for your child and yourself?

- ✿ Establish a good-bye ritual. Hug and kiss your child, sing a special song softly in your child's ear, or depending on the age of your preschooler, make a silly face to each other, or use a special handshake to say good-bye. These rituals become familiar and comforting as little ones learn that you always come back when you say you will.

Laura Fuson

Change is hard. Adults often avoid it and school-age children can find it nerve-racking, but no one resists change more vehemently than a young preschooler. Little ones don't like changes in their routine, and they especially don't like it when Mommy and Daddy leave their side. Add a little parental guilt and anxiety about leaving your child in the care of others, and you have the recipe for a tough transition at the preschool classroom door.

Leaving your screaming toddler behind as you walk away from the classroom brings intense feelings. Here are some thoughts to help you keep it all in perspective:

- ✿ Separation anxiety is normal! During baby's first year, he begins to learn "object permanence," which simply means understanding that things (and people) continue to exist even when he cannot see them. Because he now knows that you still exist when you are not in the room with him, he will do almost anything to get you to come back. Sometimes it's helpful to remember that a reluctance to have Mommy out of sight is simply a normal part of early childhood development.
- ✿ Separation issues vary from child to child. Almost all children experience anxiety to some degree, but at different ages and for varying durations. Avoid comparing your child's separation anxiety (or lack of) to others.
- ✿ This stage will not last forever. Most children outgrow separation anxiety and may even go on to leave their parents at the door without so much as a wave good-bye. That hurts almost as badly as the crying and clinging! Just

- ✿ Stay calm. If you seem nervous or distressed, your preschooler will likely pick up on your feelings and become even more anxious.
- ✿ Resist the urge to stay. Staying in the classroom with your child for "just a few minutes" is tempting, but it does not mean that she will be any less upset when you do leave. Prolonging your good-bye will not lessen the anxiety your child is feeling, nor will it communicate confidence to your child.
- ✿ Do not try to "sneak away." It might seem logical to wait until your child has become interested in a toy or activity and tiptoe away, but this practice often has the opposite effect of making preschoolers more anxious when they realize you are gone.
- ✿ Take a deep breath and leave. Calmly and quietly leave after reassuring your child that you will be back. Accept that your child's caregivers and teachers are capable of caring for him in your absence. If it helps, pre-arrange a time and method to check on your child without being "spotted" by your preschooler.

No one enjoys leaving a child who is upset and scared. The natural (and healthy!) reaction for parents is to comfort and console their children. But know that you are facing just one of the many times in your child's life that will require a little stretching from both of you. Take comfort in knowing that you are preparing your preschooler to become the independent person God designed him to be!