



*So you want to know more about...*

# Drop-Off & Pick-Up

## Such sweet sorrow..

It's so hard to hand off your baby (whether 6 months or 2 years old!) when the big day finally comes. What if something goes wrong? How will your child know you're coming back? And later, what if your child starts to like being at the center even better than being with you!

As much as we want our children to become attached to their caregiver, a small part of us might wonder, "What am I giving up here?"

The truth is, you are not giving up anything. Your child's affection for you will not be diminished by

their affection for their new caregiver. In fact, it can **increase** as a result of this new relationship. Your child will appreciate you, and your special ways, all the more when he experiences a different style of caregiving.

What about the things your caregiver does well, maybe even better than you? Think about these things as gifts you give your child. Only you know your child 100%— his special talents, struggles, and charms. But teachers are professionals. They are skilled at helping children learn how to interact with other people, develop a love of learning

and good learning habits, and yes, good at helping them learn how to function without you. This independence is a gift you and your caregiver, working together, can give your child. And it is a precious one.

Teachers recognize and value tremendously the trust you imply when you put your child in their care. And your child recognizes that trust too. Drop-offs will get easier, and you will start to feel better about this very important decision you have made. Read further for hints on easing drop off and pick-up, another emotional moment in the day.

## What does it look like?

Believe it or not, ten minutes is plenty of time for a "good" drop-off or pick-up. Here's what you should happen once your child has adjusted to the new routine.

### Drop-off

- Your teacher greets you and your child and invites her to join the group.
- Your child may hesitate for a moment, or may just leap in.
- Take a minute or two to update the teacher on your child's frame of mind, put her belongings away, and then say a quick goodbye.
- Goodbye should be short and sweet: "I'll see you tonight, have fun!"
- Leave confidently even if your child objects.

### Pick-up

- Your teacher greets you and briefly describes your child's day. She may give you verbal reminders about upcoming events, etc.
- You greet your child and find her things. Some children like to help with this, others don't.
- Check your mailbox and the dry erase board.
- Say goodbye to the teacher, but don't worry if your child doesn't bother.

### Further reading

- *Geraldine's Blanket*, by Holly Keller
- *The Kissing Hand* by Audrey Penn
- *The Runaway Bunny*, by Margaret Wise Brown
- *Wemberly Worried*, by Kevin Henkes
- *When Mama Comes Home Tonight*, by Eileen Spinelli

# A Fast Getaway?

It **can** be tempting to slip away when your child seems engaged in something, especially when drop-offs have been difficult. But this will breed insecurity in the long term, because she won't know how to tell when you are **really** leaving.

Once you say goodbye, you need to mean it. If you plan to stay a few minutes to speak with the teacher or have leeway in your schedule, don't say goodbye until you

are on your way out the door. This way your child will know you mean it.

Crying or objecting at drop-off is perfectly normal. If it's hard to leave your child crying, ask for a quick phone call to let you know how long it took her to settle down. You can also ask what you might do differently for the next drop off.

## The Light at the End of the Tunnel

Most children go through typical phases as they adjust to a new setting. Developing consistent rituals shortens the process and strengthens their new bonds.

**Objection** Your child will seem nervous or disinterested, and may even vocally object to the sight of the center or teachers. Staying positive and voicing reassurances will help you both through these first days or weeks.

**Reluctant Interest** Your child expresses interest in the teachers or activities but seems ambivalent about letting you go. Allow a few minutes with him in the room. As soon as he shows interest, let the teacher take over and say a quick goodbye. If he objects, repeat a nice goodbye and hand him over to the teacher. Children generally only fuss for a few moments after a separation like this. You can ask us to call and let you

know when they are settled during these first few rough spots.

**Active Interest** Your child will become excited upon arrival at the center. He may or may not greet teachers but will quickly become involved in activities or engage a teacher. He's telling you that he is comfortable and you can go. He may still fuss at the actual goodbye, as a special message to you that he'll miss you. You can work on using words to say those things: "I'll miss you, too, but I know you'll have fun."

**Setbacks:** Separation difficulties may reappear with stress: a move, new sibling, childcare transitions, or sometimes for what appears to be "no reason at all." If you use a consistent approach, your child will soon be back on track. In fact, the familiarity of a standard drop-off routine will be comforting.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**My child is the only one who fusses at drop-off.**

**What am I doing wrong?** Probably nothing. Children go through phases, and you may not pay as much attention to other children's setbacks when your child is doing well. That said, it **is** harder for some parents to separate from their children, and kids pick up on this anxiety. Ask your teacher to help you develop a game plan and try it for two weeks. Chances are you'll quickly see a marked improvement.

**My child doesn't fuss at all at drop off. Does this mean he doesn't care?** It could mean that the activities in the room are temporarily more exciting than your company. It could also mean that your child is completely comfortable separating from you in a

secure environment, which is great. He might also be having a delayed reaction to the transition and may start to fuss a few weeks down the road.

**My child cries when I pick up. Does this mean he hates being there or that he hates being picked up?** Neither. Children save their most powerful emotions for their parents. Crying at pick-up is a combination of emotional release, tiredness, and joy at the reunion. They have a lot to tell you about their exciting day, and few words to do so adequately. Feel free to touch base with a teacher about the day if you are concerned by your child's behavior at pick-up.