

Separation in the Fall

Why is separation important at preschool?

Separation is a developmental step for children. The time line is different for each child, and can be influenced by their individual temperament, and how they've been prepared for the separation experience. This separation provides a time for the parent to be away from the child, and for the child to experience being away from the parent while exploring in the safety of the preschool environment.

What do the children learn when separating from parents?

They learn that separation does not last forever and that parents do come back! It also provides a way for the preschooler to learn that they can trust and have fun with other adults and children. This leads to more feelings of independence and self-confidence.

How can routines help children with separation?

It is common for young children to rely on routines to feel calm and in control. Once the children have mastered the consistent routines at preschool, you can expect to notice another jump in their independence. Getting accustomed to preschool routines helps the children know what "time" it is. This helps the children predict when mom or dad will come back.

An adjustment period is normal before children adapt comfortably into their preschool class group. Some kids take one day and others might take 1-3 months. It usually helps to discuss the sequence of the preschool morning while at home or in the car on your way to school.

How can I prepare my child for separations?

- Talk about what to expect.
- Practice the separation at home.
- Read books on separation.
- Introduce your child to playmates before school begins, if possible.

How can I best separate from my child at school? Gradually.

If you want support with separation, discuss a plan with the teacher. Together you can make a plan that honors your child's current separation skill level and supports his/her development of new separation skills over time. It often looks like this:

- The parent will stay for a while then gradually leave earlier each week.
- During those first few weeks of school it is important to be available by cell or phone so you can come back if needed.
- Be clear that you want your child to stay at school.
- Assure your child that it's ok to feel sad.
- It's very important to tell your child you are leaving. Do not sneak out. Your child needs to see that you can leave – and that you will come back.

How can the teacher help?

The teacher is the consistent person in the classroom. Teary scenes actually help your child bond with the teacher while being comforted and having their feelings acknowledged. Your child's teacher is adept at nurturing children as well as distracting and redirecting the children when needed. The teacher must also consider the needs of the whole group when assisting any one child in class.

How can the parent help?

The more experiences you have and the comfortable you are with saying good bye the easier it will be for your child to take the separation in stride. Take some deep breaths and practice remaining calm, patient, and positive.

Consider trying these additional ways for your child to practice separating from you:

- Let your child have play dates at other children's houses.
- Participate in an enrichment class (art, dance, etc.) where you wait in another area while your child is in class.
- Arrange to have the carpool pick up your child at your home and drive to school
- Always say good bye when you separate and try not to prolong the good bye.
- Make your comings and going at home as regular as possible the first few weeks of school
- Experiment with an after school sitter to come and be with your child in your home. Let the sitter play with your child while you're home, but separated from your child.
- Leave your child in the care of others for a short time (1-2 hours); babysitting co-op; time away with grandma, uncle, etc
- Be ready to reassure your child. This will help your child be able to master a wide range of difficult situations.
- Give your child high-5's and compliments as he/she gains new confidence and skills.
- Connect with another parent who is willing to help you and your child in this process.
- Provide a transition/comfort object in child's locker/cubby. (check with the teacher about this)

What language can I use to support the separation process?

A few examples:

- "It's ok to miss me and be sad, but I hope you won't feel that way for very long." Make it clear he has to stay, assure him he will have fun and tell him when you will be back. "I'll be back to see you right after snack time."
- "Mommy is going to leave now. You will be here at preschool with Teacher _____. You'll have fun playing with the kids and all the toys."
- "When I come back to preschool I'll be excited to hear about the picture you paint!"
- "I know you feel upset (or mad) that I can't stay with you at preschool today, but you'll have fun playing with ____." Acknowledge your child's discomfort about separation. Then discuss the nice things that will happen to him during the time

he's away—that, for instance, he will be able to play with friends or new toys. Let them know you're coming back, and stick to your word.

What if my child is in distress?

Your child's distress may be due to his/her ability to separate at this time. It may take a few weeks or a few months to go through this stage, so do not feel rushed. Separate at a pace that is best for your child. You can get support from your child's teacher and from other parents in the class. Remember that your positive attitude fosters a more positive, 'I can do this' attitude in your child.

Special considerations:

Certain events in a child's life might cause distress or instability due to changes in your child's usual routines. Keep routines as 'normal' as possible. Offer some extra hugs and one-on-one time. Take good care of yourself during these transitions, too!

Examples-

- New sibling
- Potty training
- Moving/Remodeling
- Vacation or travel
- Change in home routine
- Chronic illness or death in family
- House guests

"Separation is a process we go through all of our lives. Though often challenging and exciting, this growth toward independence can be painful and scary, especially for young children. Parents and teachers working together, showing children that they trust and believe in one another, offer a foundation of support when the world suddenly seems a new and different place." Scholastic Pre-K/ 9- 90'

Enjoy your child's growth and development & have a fun
year!

Kate Calhoun - Victory Heights Pre-3 class Parent Educator

Adapted from resources:

1. article: Separation at Preschool by Kathy Koontz (Meredith Corporation)
2. Scholastic Magazine
3. Becoming the Parent You Want To Be, by Davis and Keyser
4. Easing Separation, National Network for Childcare Newsletter
5. 1,2,3...The Toddler Years, by Irene Van der Zande