

Saying Goodbye



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Why are goodbyes so difficult? Toddlers can have a hard time being away from their primary caregivers. Primary caregivers can have their own anxiety, too. For toddlers, being away from their “secure base” might feel scary. They often protest with crying or a full-blown tantrum. This can make it harder for primary caregivers to leave! If they feel guilty or anxious about the child care, goodbyes can be even tougher.

HERE ARE SOME TIPS FOR A “GOOD” GOODBYE:

- **Prepare yourself to keep your tone positive and upbeat.** Children pick up on the reactions of the trusted adults in their lives. Your behavior sends a message. If you are upset about saying goodbye, you might accidentally send a message to your child that there is something to be worried about. Talk to another adult about your worries so you won't look worried or sad. Don't linger. Say a quick, cheerful goodbye. Make sure your words, tone of voice, and facial expression all send the same message: *You will be okay*. Don't go back if you hear your child crying, even though it's upsetting. If you are worried, call later to check in.
- **Prepare your child.** If they are old enough, share stories on the theme of separation. You can also play with dolls who get dropped off at preschool or child care. Make sure they have a fun day and always get picked up to go home. You can visit the child care site or provider. When the time comes, let your child know that today is a child care day. Always tell your child when you will be back in a way they understand. Say, “I'll be home to kiss you goodnight,” or, “I'll see you after your nap.”
- **Plan to stay for a while.** Staying for 10–15 minutes might make things easier. If you decide to stay, it will be important to have a plan already set up with your child care provider. You'll know it's time to leave when you see that your child is comfortable. If they are having a hard time getting involved, ask your child's caregiver to stay with them as you say goodbye. That way, when you leave, they can turn to another caring adult for support.
- **Create a special goodbye routine.** For example, you can give your child a kiss on the palm to “hold” all day long. Or sing a special song together before you leave. Goodbye



routines are comforting to children. They help them understand and prepare for what will happen next. You may be tempted to sneak out because it seems like your child won't notice, but they will. They are likely to be even more upset and stressed if they don't see you leave. They may even become less trusting and clingier!

- **Use a comforting object** (see article on "[Loveys, Teddy Bears, and Blankies](#)"). Bring your child's favorite stuffed animal or a soft blanket with you. Another way to comfort a child while you are apart is to leave a family photo in their cubby or pocket. You can also start drawing a picture with your child before you leave and promise to finish it when you return.

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