

# Questions & Answers about goodbyes

Separations are a part of everyday life with children, whether you put your child in a crib for an afternoon nap, leave him or her with a trusted babysitter for a few hours, or say goodbye at the childcare center as you head off to work. Learning to be apart from each other is important. Teaching your children to say goodbye will make separations easier for both of you. Learning to cope with goodbyes early in life will also help children handle other separations as they grow older.

## 1. How early should I teach my child to say goodbye?

Begin teaching your infant goodbyes so that you set a positive pattern for the future. It does not matter if your child is too young to understand what you say. Your body language is more important. If you hesitate or if you do not clearly indicate that you are leaving, you are showing the child that you are not sure about leaving. Tell your child that you are leaving and will be back, hug and wave goodbye, and put him or her in the arms of the care provider.

## 2. How do I tell my toddler when I will return when he doesn't know about time?

Use events in the life of your child to explain when you will return. You might say, "After you have lunch and your nap, I'll be back again."

## 3. I have to leave my child at a child care center while I work. Is there anything that can ease the pain of separation for my child?

Special toys and blankets can be comforting during times of separation. Having a special toy or object close can help a child feel safer and more secure. Your child might also like having a picture of the two of you to keep while you are gone.

## 4. What should I do if my

## child says she is not going to child care because she doesn't want to be separated from me?

Allow your child to make choices about things within her control to help ease the power struggle. She can't decide whether she is going to child care, but she can decide what to take along. Give her choices over smaller events: "Would you like to ride with your bear or doll as we go to school today?" "Would you rather wear your overalls or your jumper today?"

## 5. Should I just slip away while my child is occupied so he won't cry?

It is best to say goodbye instead of slipping away. It may be easier for *you* to slip away while your child is happy and busy, but it is *harder for your child* once he realizes that you are gone. You might damage your child's trust in you, which may cause goodbyes that are more difficult in the future.

## 6. What is the best way to say goodbye?

The best way to say goodbye is in a positive, upbeat way (even if you feel sad). Give your child a big hug and tell him or her that

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you'll be back. Don't linger over goodbyes; this makes separating more difficult for both of you.

**7. My child acts out when I return. How should I handle this?**

Try to be patient with your child. When your child sees you again, she feels safe enough to unload all of the day's emotions that she has built up. Tell your child that you understand and that you missed her. Spend some quiet time together reading a book or listening to music. This will give your child time to calm down and make future separations easier.

**Source:**

Hall, N., & Schmidt, P. (1996). *Goodbyes: How to say "see you later" to your little alligator*. New York: Simon and Schuster.