

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: It's so hard to say good-bye to my little guy in the mornings when I drop him off for preschool. Any suggestions?

ANSWER: The individual's ease in transitions is a part of personality and temperament; it varies significantly from child to child. Much of what we call temperament is "out of the womb" (genetic). Although most children (and adults) develop and learn compensatory skills to cope with transition, deep within, children who struggle with transitions will always find them somewhat emotionally difficult. Good news: skills that ease transitions can be learned, and parents and teachers can help.

Consider the following suggestions:

1. **Children take emotional cues from parents.** If mom or dad is upset, frustrated, sad, or worried, the child often reacts to and mirrors the parent's emotion. Parents should have a loving, but relaxed mood when dropping off their children. Reinforce this mood by bending down, giving a quick hug or high-five, looking them in the eye and saying something like: "Love you! I'll see you after school."
2. **Make your drop-off very brief.** The longer you take to disengage from your child, the longer the "agony" and the more time is provided for your child's emotions to escalate. After the "love you, good-bye," get out of Dodge fast!
3. You might need to **partner with the teacher.** Let her know that you are planning to leave quickly so she can take your child's hand and redirect him/her to an activity.
4. **Believe you are doing a good thing** by equipping your child for the rest of life by helping him/her transition while the transition is relatively small. There will be other life transitions that are much harder.

Without question, it's hard to watch your child cry and have him/her cling to you at the beginning of every school day. Don't prolong the time it takes your child to acquire transitions skills by enabling clinging behaviors. Instead, a calm mood, a quick good-bye, and a fast exit is the best plan.

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