

A Guide to

Being Apart



There will be times when you need to be apart from your child. Starting nursery and being apart for a length of time may be new to both of you and this may often come with mixed thoughts and feelings. Your child being anxious when you leave is a perfectly normal and important developmental experience. In fact, nearly all children experience anxiety of some degree between the ages of 7 to 18 months when they separate from their parent/carer. This is because they realise at this point, that you are a separate individual and not a part of them. However, because your baby has formed a healthy, loving attachment to you and associates you with pleasure, comfort and security, if you demonstrate that you are not anxious about leaving, they will pick up on this and respond more positively.

What they do not yet understand is that when you leave them, you'll always come back. The important thing is for you to help your child be able to cope with being apart. Some of this can be done by you before starting nursery and in partnership with the nursery staff. Practise brief and safe separations, such as going into another room and whistling, singing or talking so your child knows you are still there, even though they can't see you.

As your baby learns that things continue to exist even when they can't see them (object permanence), they will feel better about letting you out of their sight. Games like peek-a-boo and hide-and-seek will help them to understand this.

Time to process

Though sneaking away may seem easier than dealing with a tearful goodbye, it will cause them to worry that you're going to disappear without warning at any moment. If your child is older, tell them what to expect. Explain where you are going and when you will be back. Don't rush the parting, but don't prolong it either. Giving your child time to process that you are leaving, smiling and being positive will help, as your child will register your emotions and eventually come to see separating as nothing to worry about.

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Take advantage of settling in sessions at nursery. These help your child to become familiar with the nursery staff and environment, and you can agree with staff on how separation is going to happen. Often a staff member will be able to get your child involved with breakfast or playing with something to distract them. **Say a quick goodbye** and let your child be distracted in an interesting activity. Sometimes a special toy can be a comfort when being separated for the first time, representing security for your child. If your child initiates separation, let them go and say something like, **"Off you go, see you later."**

Separation may be hard for both of you at first, but leading by example will help to show your child that they have nothing to fear when it does happen. We call this giving your child a 'positive cue' (Bowlby) that this is a good place for them to be without you.

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