

# It Starts with Babies: Build Skills for Success!



The clinging struggle with separation. The teary-eyed worry when they can't find you quickly. The fussing when you need to leave them with another caregiver. These can be some of the most tension-filled moments on the parenting journey and yet these feelings and behaviors are healthy for little ones to have. Young children learn how to adapt with change through goodbyes and hellos with their loved ones. This is one of the ways they can learn to develop trust.

You can continue to help your baby or toddler get ready to separate from you and prepare for a transition to child care or school. Below are some tips for preparing for these moments and some reminders that will help ease your mind as you part ways for various moments in a day.

## Growing and learning together:

### Four things you can do daily to help your baby or toddler with separation



#### Play and have fun together

Young children love to interact! Use give and take, or back and forth, when you play to help build healthy relationships.

Have less than a minute? Try this! **Mimic your child and let him mimic you.** Make a facial expression like an open mouth or raised eyebrows or even tongue sticking out. Watch as your baby tries to copy you. Make a sound or repeat a word and listen as your toddler tries to sound it out. Let your child take the lead and try to copy him!

Have longer? Try this! **Build in time for sensory play.** When you play together, involve your child's five senses: Taste foods and talk about them: *This strawberry is so red and sweet!* Play "what do you smell?" or "what do you hear"? Have your toddler close his eyes and rely on his senses; Let your child work her hands in different ways to touch and feel textures; Help your child move his body in big ways like jumping and little ways like snapping toys together.



#### Create predictable routines

Young children like to know what to expect and predictable routines can help them learn to regulate their emotions.

Have less than a minute? Try this! **Talk through routines.** Share what you are doing and why. *We need to buckle your car seat tight to keep you safe.* Talk about changes that are coming and as they happen. *Tomorrow you will be in grandma's car when you go to school. She will buckle you in, just like I do!*

Have longer? Try this! **Make a schedule with pictures.** You can use magazine pictures or photos of your child throughout her day. Tape pictures to a piece of cardboard or hang them low on the wall. Talk with your child and show the pictures to help her learn the routine. When there are changes, you can add a new picture or talk about things as you move the picture around. *I usually read you your story after bath time. Tonight, your babysitter, Ella, will read to you.*



#### Focus on feelings

Communicating about feelings can be hard. Children learn how to respond to feelings by first learning to identify them.

Have less than a minute? Try this! **Label feelings.** Point out facial expressions and talk about feelings you are having. *It's stormy outside. I feel disappointed that we cannot go outside to play right now.* Try to guess the feeling your child is having and put a name to it. *You are so excited to get to see your cousin. Look at the smile on your face, and on his! He is happy too!*

Have longer? Try this! **Read books about feelings and look at pictures of faces together.** Choose books that have characters experiencing all kinds of feelings from happy and excited to angry and sad. Point out how the characters are feeling and responding. *Can you make your face look nervous, like the mom in the story's face?*



#### Consistency to help build trust

Consistent responses from adults can help make everyday happenings for children both physically and emotionally easier.

Have less than a minute? Try this! **Play simple games like hide and seek and peek a boo.** Games like these help your child learn that even when you separate, you will be back together again.

Have longer? Try this! **Help your child be nearby yet separate from you at times.** Create moments to help your child play near you, while not with you. Keep your child in sight and help her feel safe while playing alone: *You can play with your dolls on the mat. I will be right here making dinner. After we eat, we will play together again!*

## How will these skills help my baby or toddler in child care or school?

Time with your child at home helps prepare them for their time at child care and in school. And together, with your child's teacher or caregiver, your combined efforts will help strengthen these important skills.



### Playing

In a child care or school setting, young children learn how to take turns, share toys, and make friends through play. When you play together at home, you help your child learn how to play with others!



### Understanding Feelings

Just like at home, your child will experience many types of feelings throughout his day. When you talk about feelings with your child, he will learn ways to describe his feelings while in child care or school.



### Learning Routines

Children transition and move from one activity to another while in child care and school. When you help your child learn routines at home, you help establish a foundation for understanding routines at school.



### Building Trust

It is not always easy to say "hellos" and "goodbyes" at the start and end of a day. When you help your child learn that you will separate, and you will also be back together, she will learn to trust. This can ease her worries and help her to have fun and learn at school while you are apart from one other.

## Useful Websites and Sources

Ideas for parents and caregivers, as well as behaviors to expect from children <https://zerotothrive.org/transition-back-to-childcare/>

How to talk, read, and sing you're your baby and toddler [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ecd/hhs\\_tipsforinfanttoddlerteachers\\_with\\_accessibility\\_rpt.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ecd/hhs_tipsforinfanttoddlerteachers_with_accessibility_rpt.pdf)

Social and emotional milestones, tips and strategies for infants and toddlers <https://pathways.org/topics-of-development/social-emotional/>