

Helping Families Cope with Separation in Child Care



Intent statement

In childhood, some separation experiences help to promote psychological growth by providing an opportunity for a child's learning and adaptation to new experiences. Other separations are painful and traumatic. The way in which influential adults provide support and understanding, or fail to do so, will shape the child's experience.

Procedure and Practice

The staff of the facility will engage strategies to help a child and parents/guardians cope with the experience of separation and reunion.

For the child, this should be accomplished by:

- Encouraging parents/guardians to spend time in the facility with the child and supporting the separation transition;
- Providing a comfortable setting for parents/guardians to be with their children to transition or to have conversation with staff;
- Having established routines for drop-off and pick-up times to assist with transition;
- Enabling the child to bring to child care tangible reminders of home/family (such as a favorite toy or a picture of self and parent/guardian);
- Encouraging parents/guardians to reassure the child of their return and to calmly say "goodbye";
- Helping the child play out themes of separation and reunion;
- Frequently exchanging information between the child's parents/guardians and caregivers/teachers, including activities and routine care information, particularly during greeting and departing;
- Reassuring the child about the parent's/guardian's return;
- Ensuring the caregivers/teachers are consistent both within the parts of a day and across days;
- Requesting assistance from early childhood mental health consultants, mental health professionals, developmental-behavioral pediatricians, parent/guardian counselors, etc. when a child's adjustment continues to be problematic over time;
- When a family is experiencing separation due to a military deployment, explore changes in children's behavior that may be related to feelings of anger, fear, sadness, or uncertainty related to changes in family structure as a result of deployment. Work with the parent/guardian at home to help the child adjust to these changes, including providing activities that help the child remain connected to the deployed parent/guardian and manage their emotions throughout the deployment cycle.

For the parents/guardians, this should be accomplished by:

- Validating their feelings as a universal human experience;
- Providing parents/guardians with information about the positive effects for children of high quality facilities with strong parent/guardian participation;
- Encouraging parents/guardians to discuss their feelings;
- Providing parents/guardians with evidence, such as photographs, that their child is being cared for and is enjoying the activities of the facility;
- Ask parents/guardians to bring pictures from home that may be placed in the room or cubby and displayed throughout the indoor and outdoor learning/play environment at the child's eye level;
- Where a family is experiencing separation due to a military deployment, collaborate with the parent/guardian at home to address changes in children's behavior that may be related to the deployment, providing parents/guardians with information about activities in care and at home may help promote their child's positive adjustment throughout the deployment cycle (connect parents/guardians with services/resources in the community that can help to support them);
- Requesting assistance from early childhood mental health consultants, mental health professionals, developmental-behavioral pediatricians, parent/guardian counselors, etc. when a child's adjustment continues to be problematic over time.

Applicable

This policy applies to all staff, substitute staff, parents and volunteers in the child care setting.

Communication

This policy will be reviewed with parents upon application and a summary copy will be included in the parent handbook. This policy will be reviewed with staff upon implementation, at orientation, and during annual staff training.

References

American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education. 2011. *Caring for our children: National health and safety performance standards; Guidelines for early care and education programs. 3rd edition.* Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; Washington, DC: American Public Health Association. Also available at <http://nrckids.org>.

Kentucky Child Care Health Consultation Program <http://kentuckycchc.org>

Reviewed by

Director/Owner

Board Member

CCHC/Health Professional

Staff Member

Parent/Guardian

Effective Date/Review Date

This policy is effective immediately. It will be reviewed yearly by the center director.