

Steps of Separation

1. Parent/caregiver and child visit and interact in the classroom together for a session or two. This enables the parent/caregiver and child to become familiar with the classroom and the routine.
2. Parent/caregiver sits in a chair located at the side of the classroom. The parent/caregiver should be visible to the child. The child may visit the parent/caregiver as often as s/he wants; but the parent/caregiver should not leave the chair. The goal is for the child to begin to pull away from the parent/caregiver when s/he wants to participate. Teachers should encourage, but not force, the child to come and participate. This will hopefully give the child the time to begin to enjoy the activities and to connect with the teachers, and not have to worry that his/her parent/caregiver is going to leave. The parent/caregiver should bring his/her chair to the side of the gym or playground. It is also helpful if the parent/caregiver brings something to read, so that the child interacts with the teachers and children.
3. Parent/caregiver stays in the classroom in the chair when the class goes to the gym or playground. This gives the child a short time away from the parent/caregiver and then the child can return to see that the parent/caregiver is still in the chair. This begins to develop trust that the parent/caregiver is going to do what s/he says, so that when it is time to separate the child believes that the parent/caregiver will return. It is also helpful if the parent/caregiver continues to bring something to read, so that the child interacts with the teachers and children.
4. Parent arrives early and separates from the child before the other children arrive. This gives the teachers time to give the child individual attention in separating before the other children get to school. Sometimes, it is helpful for the parent/caregiver to do something special with the child before leaving. This should be something that has a beginning and an end, e.g., read a short book, do a puzzle, etc. When it is time for the parent to leave, s/he should say goodbye and leave. Staying too long may cause even more anxiety. Parent/caregiver should be one of the first to return for pick-up.

Remember:

1. The child's responses should lead the way in moving from step to step. Move slowly in order to prevent regression. If you have to start over, the process tends to move much more slowly the second time around.
2. Be consistent. For example, if the parent is supposed to sit in the chair, s/he must do so.
3. Both the teachers and parent/caregiver should discuss each step and the plan for the next class time so that both are comfortable. These discussions should not take place in front of the child.
4. It is also important that the parent/caregiver let the child know what is going to happen; however, this discussion should not take place until the child is on his/her way to school. If the child is told too far in advance, s/he may experience anxiety worrying about it way before it is going to happen.
5. If the process is not working, teachers and parent/caregiver should sit down and create a revised plan that everyone is comfortable with.