

## Healthy Habits: Drop-Off and Pick-Up

### EASING TRANSITION

Transitions are difficult for children, especially saying goodbye to parents or being interrupted in their play to go home at the end of the day. Tears and even clinging needn't be dreaded as signs of separation “anxiety” so much as understood as healthy and natural expressions of attachment.

Your child's school or center may offer helpful guidelines for these key moments in the day, or you may have found yourself left to trial and error. Asking your child's teacher for advice outside of school hours may be a good first step to help identify how you can have a smoother drop-off and/or pick-up routine. Your attitude (calm, cool and collected!) will be the greatest support to your child. Sometimes parents don't realize that noisy and dramatic entrances or drawn-out, dramatic farewells are disruptive not only to their own children, but to the entire class as a whole.

Oftentimes, struggles that families are having with drop-off or pick-up can be soothed by considering the lists below and then shifting one or more of the parent's habits:

#### Morning / Drop-Off Ideals

- Bedtime same time every night
- Wake-up time at the same time each morning
- Wake early enough for unrushed morning and commute
- Dawdlers need time to dawdle (before or after breakfast?)
- Quiet conversation on the way to school
- Cell phones and radio: off
- Arrive on time or a few minutes early
- Meet another child and walk in together
- Brief reminders about pick-up, what your child can expect at the end of the day
- Enter room quietly
- No multi-tasking, be present with your child
- Ritual\*, calm, and not-too-lengthy goodbyes



#### Afternoon-Evening / Pick-Up Ideals

- On time, same time, every day
- Unrushed
- Parent is warm and present, leaving workday's concerns behind
- No multi-tasking (electronics put away)
- Parent enters room quietly
- Calm, ritual\* greeting with clear, one step instructions, like “Hello, I'm so glad to see you! It's time to put on shoes.” Then follow-through smoothly.
- Watch that you don't linger past the time you've said you'll go
- Be careful not to make the child wait for adult conversations
- “Goodbye and Thank you, Ms. Lee,” to teacher

\*Intentional family rituals are some of the most supportive ways to smooth transitions. You might consider how consistent and predictable your “hello” and “goodbye” rituals are. It can be helpful if farewells are brief (not rushed, but short). For example, at morning drop-off, a calm and consistently paced farewell ritual will help your child accept that you are leaving when you say you are and that you will be reunited when you say you will: “After school, Mama will pick you up and then we will have a snack on the way home. I love you. Have a good day. See you later alligator!” You might consider a consistent routine like one long hug, a kiss on each cheek, and then a quiet, “After a while crocodile!” as the parent departs. With practice, the parent leaves quickly and quietly and the child fusses less and less each day.

So long as you have confidence in your child's school and teachers\*, you and your child should be able to normalize departures and reunions over a few weeks. Remember: your child's experiencing a certain amount of distress when saying goodbye reflects normal and healthy attachment. This can help shift your feeling of “Oh, no, he's crying!” to “Yes, yes I know. It will be okay. See you soon, love.”

*\*If your child is sensing your own uncertainty about the center, school, or teacher, then that needs to be addressed by the adults before your child will feel secure in your confidence about their environment! “School readiness” applies to children and parents.*