



## Separating from Infants and Toddlers

### Tricks of the Trade

Start planning for the separation before you actually need to separate.

Always say good-bye. Good-byes are important even to very young children.

Give yourself time to make a transition. Get up a little earlier the first few days and weeks of care so you don't feel frantic when you go to work.

Tell your child when you will be back by referring to some daily child care activity, such as "I'll be back after storytime," or "I'll be back after lunch." This will be meaningful when your child is older or more accustomed to the routine of the child care situation.

Don't linger...once you've said your parting words, leave.

Always come back when you say you will or call if you are going to be late so the provider can tell your child.

Separating may be harder on the parent than it is on some outgoing infants. Don't be disappointed if baby has less trouble saying good-bye than you do.

Just remember, your baby is making new friends – but you can never be replaced!

Separating from our loved ones is a lifelong process. If you think of separation in the broadest terms, it begins at birth and ends at death. In a more limited way, it happens every day as we say good-bye to various members of our family when we or they go to work, school, child care or the corner store.

While each family handles these daily separations in its own way, the act of leaving our very youngest children in the care of another is what seems to cause the most stress. Adjusting to such a separation may challenge individual parents in different ways. Separating will also be a different process with each individual child in a family or with each child care provider along the way. The sadness or anxiety caused by initial separations can resurface as children grow older and can be triggered by many different kinds of situations, such as travel, illness or the birth of a sibling.

### **Separation Can Be Extremely Hard For Working Parents**

Many working parents who grew up in the 1960's and 70's came from families in which the mother worked in the home, and for many the belief still lingers that that's where mothers belong. In addition, the workplace has not yet adapted to the needs of working families. Many mothers strive to be good employees while remaining "old fashioned moms" – doing all things for everyone. The situation can cause a tremendous amount of guilt, stress and feelings of inadequacy as a parent. If you choose to work, or have no choice

but to work, you will need to find ways to keep these feelings at a manageable level.

### **Separation as Growth Opportunity**

Despite the stresses separations can cause, there are ways to ease the "pain" and turn this process into an opportunity. It can be a time for parents to examine their fears, beliefs and goals and to reaffirm their love and attachment to their children. For children, mastering separation at an early age can lay the foundation to meet this and other challenges with trust and confidence throughout life. We hope that some of the following suggestions work for you as your child enters the world of child care.

### **Know Yourself, Know Your Child**

Being a parent is hard work. As parents, we try to make the best decisions we can for our children and it is important for us to be as clear as possible about these parenting choices. That's why we need to spend time thinking about the past, the present and the future before planning for our children.

Think about your answers to some very important statements:

*When I was a child, I thought my parent(s) worked/stayed home because...*

*I was taken care of by...*

*I thought this person was...*

*When my parent left me, I felt...*

*I work because...*

*If I didn't have to work, I would...*

*Before I had a child, I thought I would...*

*When I look for child care, I want my*

*child to be...  
I want child care which is...  
I want my child's caregiver to...  
When I'm away from my child, I feel...*

Also, think about your child.

*My child's temperament is...  
When my child is away from me, s/he reacts by...  
My child likes to do these activities...  
My child handles transitions by...  
My child likes people who...  
My child is comforted by...  
My child sleeps best when...  
My child eats well when...*

Stay in touch with your feelings and think about how your child will react to separating from you. This is the first step to take when you decide to leave your little one with a caregiver in or outside your home. This self-examination may bring a number of issues and anxieties to the surface. Most parents have some of the following concerns:

***Will my baby love the provider more than me? and Will my baby be loved?***

Experience and research show that babies become deeply attached to their parents. The sadness that you and your baby experience when separating is evidence of that deep love. But babies can also respond with affection to others as long as their basic needs are met. This ability to “attach” to others does not dilute the affection they feel towards you. Just as babies can expand the circle of important people in their lives, child care providers can become very attached to their small charges in ways that do not interfere with the children’s relationships with their parents.

***Will my child be damaged in some way? Isn't child care bad for children?***

Child care can be a rich and rewarding experience for a child. Babies

growing up with mom at home in a nuclear family are now the exception, not the norm, and in most cultures, other people in addition to parents assist in rearing children. For “only” or firstborn children, child care can provide those missing sibling experiences which help a child learn to give and take. A number of studies have clearly demonstrated that quality child care does not in any way harm children and is, in fact, beneficial.

***Will my child be free from harm?***

Naturally, a safe environment is important in a child care setting, be it in or out of your home. If you are hiring an in-home caregiver, consider contacting TrustLine, California’s background check for in-home caregivers at [www.trustline.org](http://www.trustline.org) or (800) 822-8490. Likewise, you can call Community Care Licensing, 622-2614, to check the complaint history of licensed child care providers. Knowing what discipline methods a provider uses will also help you feel more comfortable. Your vigilance should not stop once you have decided on your child care situation. You can always drop in on your caregiver in your own home and you have the right to visit your child’s program at any time. On the other hand, accidents do happen. Be prepared for some.

***Will my child get sick more often after s/he begins child care?***

Probably. This is a time when any guilt you have about leaving your baby will resurface. While children in large child care settings get sick more often, many times this exposure to illness at an early age confers some immunity so that they do not get sick as frequently when they are older. Nonetheless, you will want to be prepared by knowing your employer’s sick leave policy and your caregiver’s policy on sick children attending care. You should also look for alternative caregivers

(friends, neighbors, relatives) for those times when your baby is too sick for her regular child care and you cannot stay home.

You may have additional concerns. Write them down and think of questions you can ask yourself, your spouse, your partner, your friends, potential providers to clarify whatever issues trouble you. Consider some of the reading resources listed at the end of this Handout. You can also call the BANANAS WarmLine to discuss your concerns. Letting go is not easy. But remember that you must learn to live with your decisions and communicate confidence in the situation to your child. To do that, you must have done all your “homework” – including spending time thinking about what working will mean for you and your family.

***Prepare Your Baby***

Prepare your child by assuring that his or her physical needs (such as eating, sleeping and pacifying) can be provided by someone other than yourself. If you are nursing your baby, make sure s/he can also drink from a bottle or cup. While there is no reason to stop breastfeeding, revise your nursing schedule so your child nurses at the times you will be together after the baby is in care. By doing this your breast milk can remain a source of nourishment if you so choose. (See our Handout, “Breastfeeding & Working” for more information.)

Look at how your baby goes to sleep. If you always nurse the baby to sleep, the transition will be harder for both the child and the provider. Begin early to teach your child other ways to fall asleep – listening to music, using a pacifier, falling asleep alone with a favorite cuddly toy, or rocking in a cradle.

When developmentally appropriate (five months and older), play hide-and-seek games like peek-a-boo, with your baby. Hide a favorite toy

under a cloth and encourage your little one to pull it off to find the toy. These games help children learn to say good-bye and hello over and over again. Talk to your baby when you leave the room for even a moment. *“Mommy is going in the bedroom to get your blanket, but I’ll be right back.”* Leaving for short periods of time and returning helps babies learn to tolerate separation. Even very young children will soon recognize that things (and parents) can go away and reappear.

Use occasional care provided by friends or relatives to get your baby and yourself used to the idea of having another person provide care. Success with occasional care sets the stage for a successful transition to child care.

### **Choose Child Care Carefully**

Nothing can give you more comfort than knowing you have looked at all your child care options and have selected the one that best meets your needs and those of your child. BANANAS has many videos and Handouts on choosing child care – including one written specifically for parents of infants. These resources suggest what to look for and questions to ask as you visit programs or hire an in-home caregiver.

Begin your search by consulting the “BANANAS Publication List” and reading the Handouts which interest you. (You can obtain the publication list, as well as our other, free Handouts by mail, at our office or by downloading from our website, [www.bananasinc.org](http://www.bananasinc.org).) You can also consult our “Video Lending Library List” – ask for the list at our office or view it online – for our many child care and parenting videos.

In addition, our referral counselors are available to discuss the various aspects of choosing care at our monthly *Choosing Infant and Toddler Care Workshop*. (Call for times

and dates or check online.) Take advantage of our many services as you look for child care. It is very important to feel good about your choice. If you are satisfied that you have made the best child care decision for your child, you will feel much more secure when it is time to actually leave your child in the care of another. (*Hint: if you select care well in advance, be prepared to pay a deposit to hold a place.*)

### **Beginning Care**

Ready or not, the day will arrive when you return to work and your child enters child care. Being well-informed will give you some measure of control. If you can afford to use care before you resume working (and the provider is available) – by all means do so. This gives you some idea about how you and the baby will react and feel. Using care ahead of time also familiarizes you with the child care routine so you can think about what your baby is doing during the day. This approach can also allow you to stay with your baby for a few days for decreasing amounts of time which helps some children ease into care. Talk with your provider ahead of time to see whether s/he agrees that this would be a good way to begin care.

If your child will be cared for outside the home, find out what items and/or equipment the provider would like you to provide. Many providers expect parents to supply diapers, formula or breast milk and a change of clothes; some might even want you to provide a crib or playpen. Others furnish these items. Always pack your child care bag ahead of time so you don’t forget that favorite toy, enough diapers or an extra pacifier. When leaving your child behind in someone else’s care, it’s a good idea to provide a “transitional” object that feels and smells familiar – a blanket, a cuddly toy or a parent’s article, such as a scarf or T-shirt.

Your child is going to take his/her cues from you. A cheery, positive attitude can be contagious. Talk to your baby as you get ready to go, during the trip in the car or on the bus. *“Today, you are going to child care and I am going to work. You will have a good time and I will be back to pick you up later.”* (If your child is staying at home with an in-home caregiver, the same issues apply.) Even if your child is too young to know the meaning of the words, your tone of voice will convey your feelings. Be as positive as possible.

Once you are ready to leave, (either from a program or your home), be sure to say good-bye. **Never** slip away without a good-bye even if parting is hard on both of you. Your child needs to hear you say, *“I’m leaving now, but I’ll be back in the afternoon. I love you. Good-bye.”* After you say good-bye – leave.

### **Separation and Stranger Anxiety**

**Separation anxiety** – It is a normal stage of development for a child to show real sadness when separated from his/her primary caregiver, be it a parent, grandparent or other person. You may be able to reduce some of this anxiety by using the child care ahead of time (as already suggested). Your provider may have other ideas for dealing with separation concerns. Give your baby time to adjust. There are no set rules and not all infants experience separation anxiety. It can take as long as three months for a child to adjust to a new child care setting.

**Stranger anxiety** – It is another perfectly normal milestone for infants to shy away from strangers after the age of five or six months. While some babies never seem frightened by new faces, most infants at this age react to a new person by crying, becoming withdrawn or clinging. Your baby isn’t reacting because the situ-

ation is bad. S/he is anxious because s/he has learned who is mom or dad and s/he is smart enough to know that this new person is not familiar. Stranger anxiety is also connected to children beginning to realize that they are separate human beings from their parents. Most children pass through the acute stages of stranger anxiety fairly quickly.

### ***During the Day***

The first few days may be the hardest for you. Ask the provider to call you or arrange a time when you can call to reassure yourself that baby is doing fine. Don't assume the worst if baby cries a bit. It can take some children several days or even weeks to become accustomed to care. On the other hand, don't be disappointed if the baby has an easier transition than you do. Some babies, especially very young babies, make a quick and uneventful adjustment to care.

### ***Saying Hello Again***

Reuniting with your child at the end of the day can be both joyous and very stressful. The travel time between your work and the child care can become a very valuable

transition time. Be sure to allow yourself enough time so you aren't frantic or rushed. Try to "separate" from your job on your way to reuniting with your baby. Both you and the baby may be a little tired and anxious. You may be greeted by a big smile, a wailing infant or a withdrawn, even rejecting, baby. Don't read too much into how your baby acts those first few days. Give your child and yourself time to settle into a routine. Your baby is learning to separate from you and learning that you will return. Sometimes the relief of seeing you again can overwhelm your little one. Take your cues from baby as to whether s/he is ready for a quiet, cuddly hello or a noisy, joyful one.

Knowing what your baby's day was like can help relieve anxiety. If your provider doesn't already keep charts on the infants in care, you can ask her to do so. The record can be very simple. Just inquire about when the baby napped, when and what the baby ate, whether the baby had a bowel movement, or cried when you left, etc. BANANAS has a "Daily Report Train" for providers to record this information. You can order it from us.

Take a few minutes when you first arrive home to sit quietly with your child and engage in some activity which makes you and your baby feel close again – nursing, cuddling reading a story, just chatting about the day. Do this before you launch into your "second shift" activities, such as cooking or cleaning.

### ***Adjusting and Regressing***

Some children adjust readily and rapidly to child care. Others need much more time. Every situation is different. Stay in close contact with your provider. Make an appointment to talk things over if you have any concerns about your child.

Parents need to be prepared for separation anxiety even with children who normally adjust well to new situations. Children often regress after being out of care when they are ill or on vacation. A visit from grandma, a new baby, a divorce or remarriage can cause a child to suffer separation anxiety all over again. Changing to a new child care program can also trigger the separation blues. When this happens, remember your past successes and reassure yourself that they can happen again.

## **Bibliography**

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### **Additional BANANAS Resources:**

- **Articles** in our Resource Library listed under the heading "Separation."
- **Handouts:** - *Setting Limits*  
- *Living with Ones and Twos*  
- *What Infants/Toddlers Need in Child Care*
- **Videos:** - *First Moves: Welcoming Child to New Caregiving Setting (#140)*  
- *What Every Baby Knows: Working Parent, Daycare, Separation. (#211)*