



# Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII ♥ WINDWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

## Separation Anxiety and Rituals

*Psychology Today* defines separation anxiety as, “the fear or distress that can happen to children when they think about separating from home or from the people they’ve become attached to.” Separation anxiety, oftentimes, begins early in life. Babies begin to show distress when they are away from their primary caregiver (e.g., parent) at approximately six months of age and it can resurface again during the toddler and preschool years. This fear and distress can happen almost overnight, which makes it shocking to parents. As worrisome as it may be, it is important to remember that separation anxiety is part of normal development.

Fortunately, there are strategies to minimize a child’s anxiety and fear. One is to establish rituals – a practice or behavior regularly performed in a set manner. In their article, Gillespie and Petersen define rituals as “special actions that help us navigate emotionally important events or transitions in our lives.” While rituals are often associated with events like weddings and holidays,



for young children, rituals in everyday routines can bring comfort to emotionally loaded moments such as separation.

This newsletter will discuss the importance of developing rituals for young children and will offer examples that you can use to help ease separation anxiety with infants, toddlers and preschoolers.



### This newsletter includes:

- ♥ **Age-specific information and suggestions** about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ♥ **Featured activities** for each age group,
- ♥ **How This Helps:** a summary of your child’s development by doing these activities together,
- ♥ **Resources:** for more information about this topic, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

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# Infants

An infant's day revolves around important routine activities such as eating, sleeping, playing and diaper changing. Establishing a pattern of these activities helps the young child know what to expect and when to expect it, thus building trust and a sense of security. If the infant is cared for by someone else during part of the day, separating from his parent will become another routine activity. A ritual, added to this routine, can make separating more manageable for everyone.

Here are examples of departure rituals to try with an infant:

- ♥ Arrive at your child's care setting a few minutes early so you can settle him in an enjoyable activity before you leave.



- ♥ Provide the care provider with a burp bib or other small item that has been sprayed with your usual perfume.
- ♥ Tell your child when you're leaving and when you'll be back – this is helpful even for babies.
- ♥ Hug your child, kiss him, then have the care provider take him to the window or door to wave goodbye as you leave.

Remember, always say "goodbye." Sneaking out without saying "goodbye" could make things worse and make it harder for him to settle the next time you leave.

## Activity for Infants: *Picture Gallery*

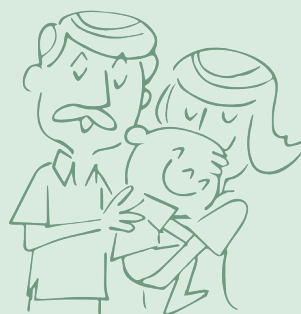
### What You Need:

Photos of family members and friends  
Tape

### What to Do:

1. Keep pictures of family members and friends on a wall or on a bulletin board.
2. Talk about the different people in the photographs.
3. Give details about their hair, eyes, smile or dimples on their cheek.
4. Talk to the child about who this person is and why they are so special to your family.

*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)*



# Toddlers

A toddler starts to recognize himself as his own person and is learning to be independent. However, despite his growing independence, separating from his parent can still be a cause for distress. Rituals can help him navigate this important transition and calm his anxiety.

Here are examples of departure rituals to try with a toddler:

- ♥ Let your child take something he loves from home, like a favorite teddy bear, pillow, or blanket. Before saying goodbye to your child, place the special item in his arms, then give him a hug.



- ♥ Read a book to your child in a special place (such as the same chair) before you leave each morning.
- ♥ Let him hold a picture of the family or something of yours as you leave.
- ♥ Use puppets to encourage him to act out stories – whether make believe or a real-life situation. You can even use this as a way to talk about what happens when you say goodbye, for example, what he does when he's at Auntie's house and what mommy does when she's at work.

## Activity for Toddlers: Sock Puppet

What You Need:

- An old pair of socks
- Washable markers

What to Do:

1. Slip a sock onto your hand and use markers to draw eyes near the toe end. Do the same with the other sock.
2. Together, name the puppets.
3. Help him put the sock on his hand and show him how to move his thumb and other fingers to make the puppet "talk."
4. Put on your puppet and start up a conversation between the two puppets – maybe your puppet can pretend that he is going to Auntie's house.
5. Have the puppets do other activities like pick up objects, tickle one another, or pinch little noses!

*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)*





## Preschoolers

As a child enters his preschool years, he may demonstrate increasing independence in exploring his surroundings and a desire to do more things for himself. Yet, he still needs reassurance that you are nearby when he needs you. An established morning routine at home is a great way to help you and your little one prepare for that final goodbye. Establishing a “morning ritual at home” will help ease him into the transition to child care.

Here are examples of morning rituals to try with a preschooler:

- ♥ Wake him up with a hug or a kiss and tell him how much you love him.



- ♥ Sit down to breakfast together – have a conversation about what you and he will do today, first, next, and last.
- ♥ Lay out two or three clean outfits and let him decide which he will wear.
- ♥ Send along a “comfort bag” that is filled with a few items that will offer comfort and remind him of home. For example, a favorite book, a few family photos, a small toy. Remind him of the comfort bag as part of your goodbye ritual.
- ♥ Place a heart-shaped “kiss” in his backpack to remind your child that you love him and will return soon.

### Activity for Preschoolers: *Make a Kiss Box*

What You Need:

- 2 small boxes or containers (one for you and one for the child)
- Child- sized scissors
- Paper

What to Do:

1. Decorate the outside of the small boxes with paint, markers, or stickers. Label each of the boxes (e.g., “Mom’s Kiss Box” or “Joshua’s Kiss Box”).
2. Make “kisses” by having your child cut out hearts (or any shape) and then write the word “kiss” on each heart. If he is not able to write it, let him draw.
3. Talk about how the hearts represent kisses from each other. Take turns putting your “kisses” in the child’s box, and his “kisses” in your box. As he puts a “kiss” in his box, kiss him on the cheek or hand.
4. Tell him that when he is feeling sad and missing you, he can go into his “Kiss Box” and get a kiss from you.

*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)*



## How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development:

### Physical Development

- ♥ Use and strengthen small muscles such as facial muscles, fingers, hands, and toes
- ♥ Learn through the senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching

### Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Develop a close bond with you
- ♥ Build trust in you and other important people

### Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Connect words and sounds he hears with what he experiences
- ♥ Build verbal skills and vocabulary

### Cognitive Development

- ♥ Develop his thinking and problem solving skills
- ♥ Develop his creativity and imagination



## Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons such as math and science concepts, fine motor skills, and language development. As you make this recipe with your child, ask questions throughout the process and encourage his thinking skills. Talk about kitchen safety. Show him how to handle items safely and allow him to do as much as he is capable of. Most of all, have fun!

### Apple Pizza

Ingredients:

- 6 slices of bread
- 1 – 8 oz. pkg. shredded mild cheddar cheese
- Butter, slightly softened
- Apple, sliced into bite-sized pieces

Directions:

1. Have your child use a butter knife or spoon to spread butter on the bread.
2. Have him sprinkle the shredded cheese on the bread.
3. Have him add the apple pieces on top of the cheese.
4. Place on a cookie sheet and bake at 350 degrees for 12–15 minutes until the cheese has melted.
5. Cool for a few minutes and enjoy!



## Resources

### Adjusting to Preschool – PBS Parent

<http://www.pbs.org/parents/daniel/fred-rogers-timeless-wisdom/adjusting-to-preschool/>

In this article, the author acknowledges that separation from loved ones can be difficult for young children, and offers helpful hints.



### NAEYC for Families: 12 Ways to Help Children Say Goodbye

<https://families.naeyc.org/learning-and-development/child-development/12-ways-help-children-say-goodbye>

The author presents 12 helpful tips for helping a child transition to a classroom or other care setting.

### NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children): Rituals and Routines

[https://www.naeyc.org/yc/files/yc/file/201209/Rock-n-Roll\\_YC0912.pdf](https://www.naeyc.org/yc/files/yc/file/201209/Rock-n-Roll_YC0912.pdf)

*Young Children* article that highlight the difference between rituals and routines and offer practical tips for care providers to support a child's transitions.

## Suggested Books

Discover these books and more at the **Hawai'i State Public Library** [www.librarieshawaii.org](http://www.librarieshawaii.org).

### Infants and Toddlers

***Families*** by Shelley Rotner and Sheila M. Kelly

This inclusive look at many varieties of families will help young readers see beyond their own immediate experiences and begin to understand others.

***Bye Bye Time*** by Elizabeth Verdick and Marieka Heinien

Being dropped off at childcare means saying good-bye to Mom or Dad—and for many toddlers, bye-bye is a big deal. Toddlers learn that good-bye is just for a while.

### Preschoolers

***The Kiss Box*** by Bonnie Verburg

A reassuring story about separation and love. Little Bear suggests that they make each other a Kiss Box—filled with a hundred kisses—that they are able to stay connected—no matter where they are.

***Llama Llama Misses Mama*** by Anna Dewdney

It's Llama Llama's first day of preschool! Will Mama Llama come back? Of course she will. But before she does, the other children show Llama Llama how much fun school can be!



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