



# How Do I Prepare My Child for Child Care?

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## FIRST PREPARE YOURSELF

Many parents feel guilt, jealousy, and sadness when leaving their child with a caregiver for the first time. This is completely normal – it's a sign of the deep love and attachment you feel for your child.

Many parents are afraid that their child will become more attached to the caregiver than to the parent. Don't worry! Your child knows you are the parent and feels a strong bond with you. At the same time, it's important for children to develop an attachment to their caregivers, in order to feel safe and happy during the day. That attachment doesn't interfere with the parent-child bond. It just adds to your child's circle of love and trust.

Some parents worry that child care will harm their child. But in most cultures, babies and children are cared for by other adults besides the parent. Child care gives children the chance to play with other children and opportunities for experiences that help them learn. Many studies show that quality child care does not harm children – it benefits them.

Beginning child care will be an adjustment for your child. But remember, your child is going to take cues from you. A positive attitude can be contagious!

*For tips on finding the right child care program, see 4Cs Tips on "Choosing Child Care"*

## BEFORE THE FIRST DAY

**Read your child books about going to child care.** Some good ones are *Franklin Goes to School*, by Paulette Bourgeois; *Starting School*, by Anne Civardi and Stephen Cartwright, *Starting School*, by Janet Ahlberg, and *Going to Day Care* by Fred Rogers.

**Plan social activities with other children,** especially if your child hasn't spent much time with other children. It's especially helpful if your child can get together with others who will be attending the same child care program.

**Occasionally let friends or relatives care for your child,** to get both of you used to the idea of another person providing care.



**Visit the child care program with your child,** so he can see where he will be spending time. Explain the schedule and describe what to expect for circle time, snacks, rest, and indoor and outdoor play.

## THE FIRST DAY

Allow plenty of time at home to get ready, so you and your child can start off peaceful and calm.

**Talk to your child on the way to child care:** “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.” Try to give specifics: “After nap, you have snack, then you play, then Mommy will pick you up.”

**If possible, plan to stay a while** on the first day or week in the new caregiving situation. Allow your child to move toward the caregiver or other children at her own pace.

**Ask ahead of time** whether the program allows children to bring a favorite comfort item like a book or stuffed animal. If so, the familiar object may make the transition easier.



## EVERY DAY

Develop a quick, fun ritual that you and your child share when you arrive (so that your child looks forward to going).

**If your child has a hard time separating,** ask the caregiver to greet him and help him feel welcomed and interested in some activity.

**Always say goodbye** – never sneak away, even if the goodbye is difficult. Invent a special parting ritual – such as a high-five, or saying the same thing every day. It can be something silly, like, “I’ll be back for you soon, before we see the moon.” It’s comforting for children to repeat the same ritual every day.

**Take a little extra time at drop-off and pick-up** to talk with the caregiver. In the morning you can share information about how your child is doing. In the afternoon, the caregiver should tell you about the child’s day. This communication creates a partnership that benefits your child.

**Create special family routines during non-working hours,** to give your child some events to look forward to in the working week. For example, family night at the library on Wednesday.



## REMEMBER: ADJUSTMENT TAKES TIME

**Your child may go back to earlier behaviors** while she adjusts to a new child care situation. If he was toilet-trained, he may start having accidents. If she was beginning to talk, she may have less to say. These are temporary delays while your child works on getting used to new surroundings and caregivers.

**Your child may cry or complain** at drop-off or pick-up time. “I don’t want you to go!” or “I don’t want to go home.” Transitions can be difficult for children, even if they are happy both in child care and at home. Try to remain calm and positive, and talk your child through the transition. For example: (At drop-off time) “I have to go work, and you will have fun here [with Kevin and Anita] [building with blocks] etc.” (At pick-up time) “I’m glad you enjoy being here! You can come back tomorrow.”