

TODDLER SEPARATION: Making it Easier for Child and Adult

Helpful advice from
Children's Harbor Montessori School

One of the most problematic aspects of toddler and pre-school age is separation. A child can start pre-school as early as age two. The child is separated maybe for the first time from the primary caregivers. The stresses of separation have an impact on the functioning of the child as well as on the parent.

What can pre-school staff do to assist children and parents with their separation problem? How can they support the children in such a way that the feelings of anxiety and loss are reduced? What can they do to help children develop methods of coping with separation? The following suggestions are drawn from our experiences with children whose behavior reflects various types and aspects of separation experience.

There are several ways to alleviate the intensity of separation anxiety. In the beginning of the school year, we always ask the parents to stay with their children at the time of entry and at other points when the children are having a difficult time. It can be helpful if the parents can spend some time with his/her child during the day within the school setting. This helps the child feel safe in the new environment.

It also eases the anxieties of the children when they bring something from the home that connects home and school, in the child's mind. This might be a

blanket, a toy or some possession of the parents. Many times, especially with toddlers, it is very helpful to have some photos of the parents and favorite relatives in the classroom.

The most important thing is to acknowledge the child's feelings about separation. We greet and say goodbye to our children with handshakes to actively acknowledge by word and gesture the events of leaving and reunion. During the day the children have many opportunities to talk about their parents and home.

Children usually acquire a variety of new skills in pre-school settings. These new skills, together with the natural maturation process, give children the feelings of self-direction, competence and enjoyment, which serve to alleviate feelings of helplessness.

The social skills they learn in the classroom will go far in helping them learn to adapt and cope with stress.


**To inquire about
Children's Harbor
Montessori School's
Transitional Toddler
(ages 2-3); and
Preschool (ages 3-6)
programs, please call
(718) 442-6112**

More on Pre-school Jitters

by Dina Baio-McLaughlin, Director

Q. Is there an appropriate age for a child to begin pre-school and how can you tell if your toddler is ready?

A. Anywhere from 18 months on. A child is usually curious in other children.

Q. How can you prepare your toddler for pre-school?

A. It is nice to start in a Parent-Toddler class, where you can accompany your child in the various activities for 2-3 hours per week.

Q. What steps should you take to get your toddler excited about pre-school?

A. Discuss the different activities the child will be doing in school. Talk about the friends he/she will make. MOST IMPORTANTLY - take him/her for a visit to the school; experience the class and meet the teachers.

Q. How should you react if your toddler is reluctant to separate during the first days of pre-school?

A. TAKE YOUR CUES FROM THE TEACHER! They are experienced professionals. Do not show your child that you are upset. Be calm and reassuring. Tell him you will pick him/her up when class is over.

Q. What is a healthy and realistic period of adjustment?

A. The time it takes to adjust depends on how the parent and teacher handle the situation, and/or whether the child is transitioning from a day care experience to pre-school, etc. Adjustments can range anywhere from one day upwards to 2 months. Each child is different.

Q. Is it advisable at any point for a parent to remove a toddler from pre-school?

A. Only in extreme circumstances. If the child's personality changes and they become withdrawn and quiet. Young children thrive on the security of a routine, be it the rhythm of the day with Mom, or the experience of the day at school with friends. Most will adjust in time and do well.

Q. How can parents deal with their own anxieties about separation?

A. Discuss it with parents who have been through it already. Learn as much as you can about the school. Feel comfortable with it, so your sense of confidence in your choice is felt by the child. Meet the staff, talk to them. Observe.

Q. How can parents become more involved in their toddler's pre-school experience?

A. Demonstrate your support and interest by being involved in school activities. **Discuss your child's day with them each day.**