

Helping children to cope with separation distress

Parents and carers and staff can help children manage their separation distress by:

Working together

- ▶ Share information about what is going on in your child's home and early childhood service
- ▶ Develop a positive goodbye routine together (e.g., sharing a 'high-five', a special goodbye hug, or some funny or loving gestures such as 'bear hugs')
- ▶ Connect your child with staff members the family knows well and are available to greet them.

Building trust

- ▶ Always say 'goodbye' to your child and let them know when you will be back
- ▶ Always respond to a child's distress
- ▶ Try to be reliable and on time when you return to your child.

Building safety

- ▶ Be calm, warm and friendly
- ▶ Avoid lengthy goodbyes as they may increase separation distress
- ▶ Support the child to become engaged in an enjoyable experience before leaving
- ▶ Have routines so children feel safe and are able to predict when their parents and carers will return.

Children's mental health and wellbeing is supported when staff and families work together to enable children to have positive goodbyes.

Preparing your child

- ▶ Visit the new early childhood service with your child
- ▶ Find out about and engage in the service's orientation activities and processes
- ▶ Gradually build up your child's experiences of separation so that they feel safe and reassured
- ▶ Shorten the first few days at the early childhood service
- ▶ Talk with your child on the way to the service about what will happen and reassure them you will be back.

Reconnecting and providing continuity

- ▶ Spend extra time with your child when you reunite to reconnect again
- ▶ Allow children to express their distress, acknowledge the child's feelings and avoid labelling or criticising
- ▶ Talk with your child about what you can do when you see each other again
- ▶ Increase the child's feelings of safety and connectedness by bringing a familiar toy or photo from home
- ▶ Talk with your child about their day and what they enjoyed.

This resource and further information on the national KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative is available to download at www.kidsmatter.edu.au. The KidsMatter Early Childhood team also welcomes your feedback which can be submitted through the website.



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