



# Parents of Young Children

(2 and 3 year olds: What to do when your child cries as you leave.)

## Understand why your child may be crying

### **1. Separation anxiety:**

Children this age often cry when separated from their parents. It's a natural part of a child's growth and development to feel secure when their parent is with them and less secure when the parent leaves. Children adapt according to different personalities and ages as they become more secure with a parent leaving them. A normal part of growth is children overcoming their separation anxiety by learning that it is okay for a parent to leave them because the parent does return.

### **2. Unfamiliar setting:**

A child will often cry when put in an unfamiliar setting. Some children according to personality adjust quicker to new environments than others. The environment for all children will make a difference on how quickly they feel secure.

### **3. Anxiety because others are crying:**

Children are learning how they are to respond when they encounter a new setting or learning how to let their parents leave them. One child crying in such a setting will often cause another child to cry in response to the anxiety in the room.

## Advice for parents when leaving your child

### **1. Don't surprise the child with a new setting.**

As much as possible, help your child become familiar with a new setting. It is helpful before the new situation begins to tell your child what to expect from the new activity or place. If possible, visit the new setting for just a few minutes before actually attending. Tell the child that when they return, there will be other children to play with or it will someday be their room also.

### **2. Don't downplay your child's unhappiness.**

When you bring your child for the first time and your child is unhappy, acknowledge the child's sadness. Say something like, "I know you are sad (or upset) right now. Look around at all the fun things there are to do. Let's try to find something you would like to do. I'll watch you for a minute or two before I go."

### **3. Don't stay for more than just a few minutes.**

It will not help your child adjust for you to stay longer. It is easy for parents to feel frustrated, bewildered or embarrassed when their child continues to cry for long periods. A parent's first instinct is to stay with their child and comfort him/her. However, young children can pick up on their parent's emotions of bewilderment and this may make it more difficult for a young child to stop crying. Though the parent needs to be empathetic, the parent needs to keep as calm as possible, and leave after a quick moment of reassurance.

#### **4. Communicate with the adult(s) in charge.**

Turn your child over to the adult in charge. Hug the child and then leave. Let the adult in charge know where you will be. Talk to that adult about how long the child may remain upset before you should be called back. Each case is individual. If a child is still crying after seven to ten minutes, and will not seem to stop, this would be an appropriate time to call the parent.

#### **5. Understanding the effect of parents in the room.**

Parents are frequently asked to help in their child's classroom. You can support the staff by helping with projects and observing what your child is doing. However, most children are better adjusted in a classroom without their parents than when their parents are there. Many happy, well-adjusted children will become clingy or weepy when their parents are in the room with them. If your child is experiencing lots of difficulty in the room, often it is best to see how the child does in the room while you are not present. Visit with the adult in charge to see how the child responds to your absence.