**VENTURING OUT**

- **Mobilizing.** Characterized by their new ability to walk on their own, toddlers are consumed with exploring.
- **Learning to Separate.** An infant’s new ability to walk, however, is challenged by his dependence on his parents and the feeling of safety he gets from keeping them close. Balancing the need to become independent and returning to the safety of home base is a challenge both for toddlers and their parents.
- **Overflowing with Newness.** A toddler can be overwhelmed by all the developments associated with his new discoveries and developing sense of self. And, his new awareness of language and feelings can lead to new fears—mistrusting parents’ disapproval, for example, with a lack of love.
- **Discovering his Body.** A toddler’s new repertoire also includes learning about gender and bodily functions.

**How does attachment progress?**

In the first three years of life, experts believe that there are clearly defined shifts in the way that children understand themselves and create relationships with people and their environment. Each shift coincides with a leap in physical and emotional development. Experts point to a variety of interactions that form the basis of early relationships; they include feeding, playing, talking and bedtime routines. Through the progression of attachment shown here, you and your child will form a trusting relationship, and your child will be allowed to move from dependence to self-assertion, confidence, and the ability to function independently in her world.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birth</td>
<td>0 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>Concentrating on adapting to his new environment, he learns to regulate his eating and sleeping patterns.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>More alert—he smiles, makes eye contact and celebrates sounds.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Showing excitement and can avoid his gaze when the excitement is too high. Using verbal and nonverbal cues to signal his needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12-15 months</td>
<td>More secure—can avoid his gaze when the excitement is too high.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 months</td>
<td>More secure—can avoid his gaze when the excitement is too high.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Tips for easing separation anxiety**

1. **Say goodbye.** Waving bye-bye to your toddler is something you should not avoid doing. At first, this may make her cry, but if you just disappear, and she thinks you might leave her at any time, she will cry and cling to you constantly.
2. **Prepare your child.** Talk to your child about what is going to happen to help him think ahead. You may think that he does not grasp what you are saying, but he understands much more than he can actually say.
3. **Be optimistic.** Do not let your apprehensions show when you are leaving your child. Show optimism by saying, “I think you are going to have a wonderful time playing with the other children today!”
4. **Provide a comfort object.** At first, when the anxiety is the strongest, you may want to allow your child to keep an object that will make her feel close to you. Examples: a stuffed animal or a pillow from her bed.
5. **Help label his emotions.** Even though it will be some time before your child starts to understand his emotions, you can label what he is feeling. When you are walking out the door and your child screams for you not to leave, explain that what he is feeling is “missing” you. Also, add that you have the same feeling, and you understand.
6. **Take things slowly.** When you are getting ready to go back to work after being with your child at home, it is a good idea to have a transition time with the new caregiver, your child and yourself. This gives everyone an opportunity to get acquainted and become comfortable with the new situation.
7. **Arrange same-time departures.** To make saying goodbye easier, try having your child exit first. When you drop her off at the nursery, have the caregiver take her outside to play. Be sure to wave bye-bye to her as she is leaving you.
8. **Employ favorite pastimes.** You might also like to have your child care provider involve your child in a favorite pastime. He may get upset when she sees you are leaving; however, it will be much easier for him to get re-involved in something he is already working on.
9. **Help her learn to deal with separation.** Eventually your child will learn how to cope and understand that she must be separated from you sometimes. This may take some time, but she must learn this important developmental task. She will use it for the rest of her life.

How important is the parent-child relationship?

Building a healthy relationship through sensitive and responsive care—

with an emotional investment—

allows your child to feel safe and secure, provides him with a solid base for exploration and allows him to communicate his feelings.

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