

Together in Caring:
Supporting Mental
Wellness in
Home Child Care

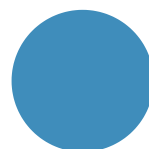
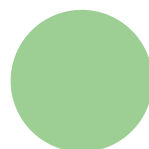
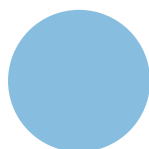


Transitioning to Child Care

A guide for parents and home child care providers.



Child Care Providers
RESOURCE NETWORK



About CCPRN:

Child Care Providers Resource Network is a non-profit, charitable organization dedicated to providing training, support, and information to home-based child care providers. CCPRN celebrates 40 years as a successful organization with a network reach of over 4500 providers and parents. Please visit www.ccprn.com for more information.

Have a question? Contact us at childcare@ccprn.com.



Want to help? Donate now at www.ccprn.com/donate.

When you donate to CCPRN, you are securing a future where home child care providers are able to access the tools and support they need to provide quality care.

A special thank you to the Ottawa Community Foundation for supporting this project:

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Introduction

Securing child care can be one of the most stressful challenges of parenting. Searching for that perfect spot—where you know your child will be well cared for, where you feel that the provider’s child rearing values and beliefs are in line with your own, where the location and hours fit with your schedule, and where you trust in the provider’s skills and abilities—can be overwhelming and exhausting. The same can also be said for those of you offering home child care—connecting with a family, holding interviews, and reviewing policies to ensure that it will be a good match is no doubt one of the most stressful parts of running a home child care business.

Once arrangements have been made, and with this step out of the way, it’s time to start thinking about the transition to child care and about growing those initial conversations and meetings into a meaningful partnership. After all, you will be parenting together to support and enrich early childhood development.

That's where this guide comes in—we know that starting child care can be hard. With this in mind, we've set out to offer a range of practical suggestions and online resources for both parents and providers. Tools and tips to help ease the transition, establish a sense of belonging, and pave the way for a successful child care partnership.



Home child care providers are one of the most influential people in a child's early life—helping to shape the developing brain and laying a strong foundation for future learning and growth. A quality home child care environment features a caregiver who is committed to the well-being and safety of the children in their care. This commitment begins during the transition phase as the caregiver works to establish a secure attachment and foster a deep sense of belonging for each child.

A secure attachment—the component of an adult-child relationship relating to the child's safety and security—develops from a consistent, reliable, responsive, and caring relationship. It is within this secure attachment that young children learn to trust others. It also provides them with a safe place from which to explore and investigate the world. Feeling secure and having a strong sense of belonging allow children the freedom to learn and grow.



One of the most fundamental and intimate human needs is the need for connection and belonging—the feelings and experiences of being valued and of forming meaningful relationships with others. Ontario’s pedagogical document *How Does Learning Happen?* describes belonging as a core foundation of the framework.

"When children are strongly connected to their caregivers, they feel safe and have the confidence to play, explore, and learn about the world around them. Enabling children to develop a sense of belonging as part of a group is also a key contributor to their lifelong well-being. A sense of belonging is supported when each child's unique spirit, individuality, and presence are valued."

[How Does Learning Happen?](#) Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years, page 24



Home child care environments allow children to grow and learn within the comfort and structure of a family setting. Just as with any family, connection and relationship between the members of a home child care family are essential. A strong foundation of trust, open communication, mutual respect, and kindness between a parent and provider will allow the child to flourish.

Starting Home Child Care: What to Expect

All children are different and each child will adjust to child care in their own time and way. Factors including the child's age, communication skills, and comfort with being left in the care of others, all contribute to how a child might react when starting child care. Here are a few general things to expect:

- A range of emotions that might include excitement, joy, apprehension, sadness, and/or worry.
- A possible change in behaviour and/or eating/sleeping/toileting habits.
- Days that are easy and days that are hard.



“If we who are responsible for children can give a sense of belonging, a sense of significance; if we can hold onto the heart and make it safe, if we can give them a sense of being known...this creates the womb for maturation.”

–Gordon Neufeld



A Note About COVID-19



The COVID-19 pandemic has made transitioning to child care even more difficult for many of our young friends. Having been exclusively in the care of their parent(s) for their entire lives (or nearly so), and without the benefits of playgroup, park playdates, family gatherings, social get togethers, and/or visits with Nanny, little ones are struggling. And naturally so.

Many parents and caregivers will need to be extra patient, allowing for an even longer, more gradual entry to child care. Flexibility is key. The transition period might take a month instead of one or two weeks. Planning ahead for a longer settling-in time will allow everyone to feel more comfortable and secure.

While the following ideas and strategies are meant as a resource to help during the usual transition period, they can also be used and/or adapted to help during the pandemic—both for children starting child care and for those returning to care following an extended time at home.

Following the child's cues and responding to their needs with kindness and care is the first step in ensuring a positive home child care experience.

Easing the Transition: What can parents do?

- Read about child care together and talk about it in a warm and loving way. See book list below.



- If possible, visit your library, park, or local playgroup for an opportunity to observe and/or interact with others (adults and children), enjoy circle or story time, see new faces, hear new voices, try new activities, etc. Regular neighbourhood walks can also provide an opportunity for your child to see other people, get used to being out and about, and get to know their surroundings.
 - Nurture a strong relationship between your child and their new caregiver. Build trust with a gradual entry and a slow warm up to child care. When your child sees you interact positively, they will learn from your cues that the caregiver is a safe person that they can rely on to meet their needs and to provide comfort and care.
 - Get familiar with the new morning and daycare routines ahead of time. Practice waking up and getting ready. Adjust nap/bedtime routines as needed. Prepare what you can the night before.
-
- Ease into the new child care schedule together. Your provider can help you plan a smooth and gradual transition period. For example, starting with shorter visits and working up to full days.

What can parents do?

- Practice separating and saying goodbye. Start by taking a walk or running a short errand while you leave your child with another trusted adult. Be sure to tell your child that you are leaving, that they'll be cared for by Granny/a neighbour/etc., and that you'll be home soon. Try to give a time marker that will be familiar to your child: after snack, in time for lunch, before bath, etc.
- Share lots of information about your child with their caregiver: any distinctive cues (i.e. when tired), special words they might use (Is "baba" for bottle or blanket, or is it what they call their Dad or Grandma?), activities and foods they enjoy, any particular fears or dislikes, etc. If your language at home is different than the language at child care, share a few basic words or phrases with your caregiver.



What can parents do?

- Tell your child that you will be going to work and that they will be going to child care. Talk to them about what you will do at work and about what they will do at child care. Share as much information about the care arrangement as you can with your child.



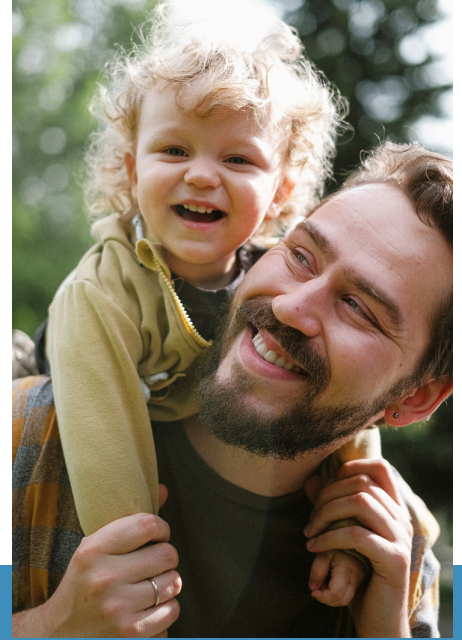
- Bridge the separation by focusing on the next point of connection: "When I pick you up we'll...", "Tonight before dinner...", "After daycare we're going to...", "On our way home, let's...". Be sure to follow up with whatever you've said. This doesn't need to be a big activity, it can be as simple as checking the mailbox, reading a book, or listening to a favourite song in the car. The focus is on the two of you being together again.



- Give your child something physical to take care of while you're away: a family photo, a little note, something small to keep in their bag. This item will also be a comfort for when they are missing you or feeling sad.

What can parents do?

- Create a goodbye ritual --a special hug, a kiss in their palm, a little rhyme, a few special words, a wave at the window, etc. and say/do it at every drop off. (See Transition Rituals below).



- Say goodbye and let your child know that you are leaving. Sneaking off can increase anxiety and leave a child with feelings of mistrust, creating a sense of unease or panic. The child is left in a state of "high alert" wondering if you might suddenly appear or disappear.
- Drop-offs should be kept short. A quick goodbye, tell them you will be back, a little kiss/goodbye ritual, and leave with a smile. This should be under 5 minutes. Your child will learn to trust by seeing that you are confident in leaving them with the caregiver.
- Know that tears are ok. Missing you is ok. Being sad about the separation is ok. These are all indicators of a strong attachment to you--tears, missing you, and sadness are all very healthy and normal during the transition to child care. Before or during drop off you can validate their emotions and offer reassurance. *"I know that you're sad, I will miss you too. Susan is going to take good care of you"*. Continue to keep the drop-off short and follow a simple, consistent, drop-off routine.
- Keep in mind that you can always call later to check-in and see how things are going.

What can parents do?

- Be on time for pick up. At home, and if necessary, revisit any sadness and reassure your child. *"You were sad this morning. I missed you too. I'm glad that we have this time together now."* Provide time and attention to play and connect--even if only for a short while. For an older child, ask them about their day and follow up with other open-ended questions.
- Allow for extra cuddle time and expect that your child's behaviour and napping, sleeping, eating, playing, and/or toileting patterns might change during the transition.
- Make sure there are no other major changes in your child's life. Changes such as moving, stopping to breastfeed, etc. should be put off for a few weeks if at all possible.
- Communicate openly with your home child care provider. Ask for their suggestions to ease the transition. They have likely done this many times before and can offer valuable advice.
- Respect the child care policies and routines. Caregivers work diligently to plan a balanced day that works for all of the children in their care.



A Note About Napping

Nap time is often the most challenging part of the transition process--both for a new child and for the provider helping several children settle into sleep. Parents can take some important practical steps, **at home before starting daycare**, to make this process easier for everyone.

- Several weeks before starting home child care, slowly adjust your child's afternoon nap to the daycare's nap schedule--both for starting and ending nap.
- If your child needs help to fall asleep--being held, rocked, nursed, someone to be by their side, etc. falling asleep at daycare will be much harder. Gently help and support your child to fall asleep without being held.



"If the parent can get the child to sleep by laying them down, rubbing their back, using soft soothing music etc., by the time they go to child care going to sleep is not such a big leap. I transition children over two weeks, no naps until the middle of the second week (sleep is the last sign of a child settling in). It usually takes about 3 weeks for the average child to start having a decent nap."

—your neighbourhood home child care provider

- Often a child will still need a short morning nap if they are between 12-16 months old. If you communicate with your caregiver about your daily routine then that morning nap can usually be accommodated with the goal of easing it out over time. The longer afternoon nap should coincide with the time when the other children are also resting.

A Note About Nursing

Breastfeeding can also impact your child's transition to daycare. Be sure to work out a plan with your caregiver well in advance. While dropping by at lunch to nurse your little one might seem ideal, the reality is that this can be very confusing for your child and for the other daycare children.

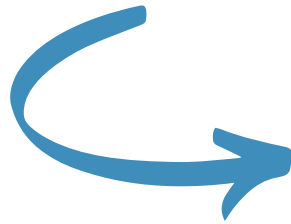
Experienced providers recommend that parents do not stop by to nurse while their child is at daycare. Instead, breastfeed before and after daycare and as you usually would during the evening and nighttime. If you like, send a bottle or little cup of breastmilk for your child to have with lunch.

For little ones who also like to nurse for comfort, you can slowly introduce a lovey or other comfort object as you nurse for comfort at home. This little blanket or teddy can then help to comfort your child while at daycare.

Planning ahead and consulting your home child care provider for guidance will help to ensure that the transition is as smooth as possible.

When Saying Goodbye is Hard

Check out this great infographic from Dr. Deborah MacNamara offering suggestions to help bridge the separation.



<https://macnamara.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/2.pdf>

Cherish the time you do have together:



Maintaining and building connection with your child is as important now as ever. Check out this resource from Conscious Discipline describing the four critical elements required for connecting with your child: eye contact, presence, touch, and playfulness.



https://consciousdiscipline.s3.amazonaws.com/Free-Resources/Printable-Posters-Tools-Activities/FREE-Printable-4_Elements_Connection.pdf

Easing the Transition: What can providers do?

- Work with parents to create a gentle and gradual transition period prior to starting care, especially full day care. Negotiate an arrangement that works for everyone. If possible, have the parent join you on trips to the park or in the community starting a month or two before the initial start date. The child and parent will get used to you, your voice, and your style and routines, as well as the other children. You will be able to build a relationship with the parent and get to know this new little person.

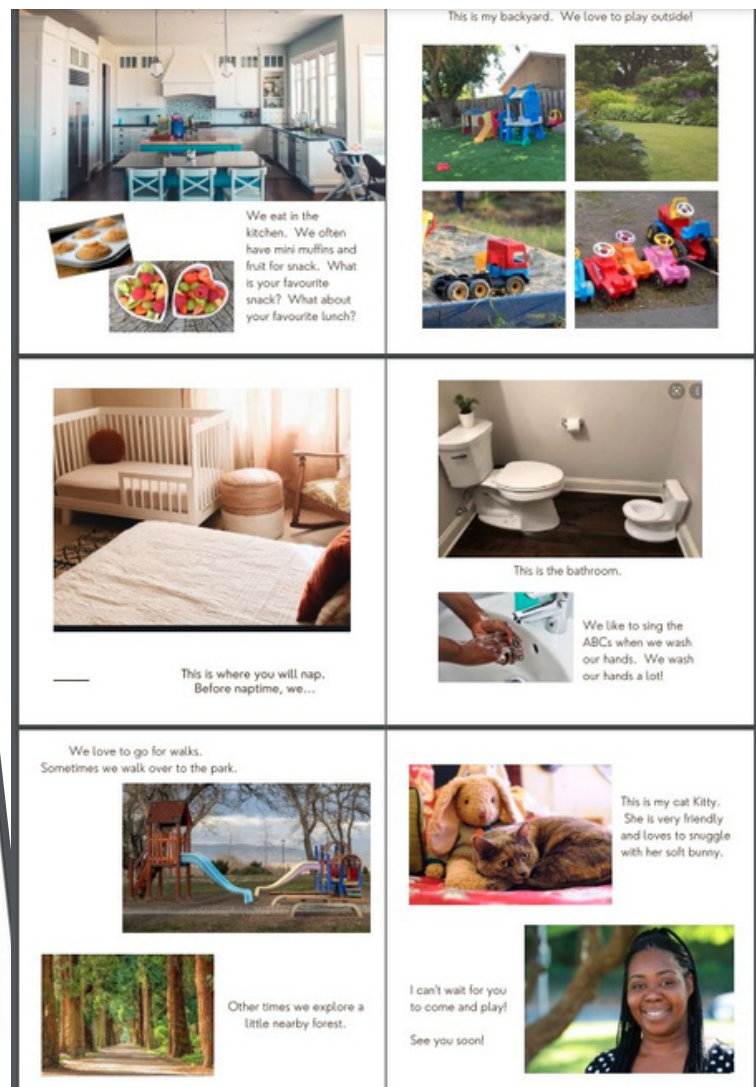


- The week or two before care starts, slowly build up the amount of time the child spends in your care – from 2 hours with the parent, to two hours without the parent, then a morning without the parent, the morning with lunch, most of the day with an early pick up, and then a full day.
- If possible, schedule a visit when you don't have other children in care. One-on-one time with a new child (with or without the parent) can go a long way to establishing a solid connection.
- Each family's ability to transition will be different as will your availability; however, a longer transition time will foster stronger attachments and build relationships that create comfort and security for everyone--especially considering the COVID-19 pandemic.

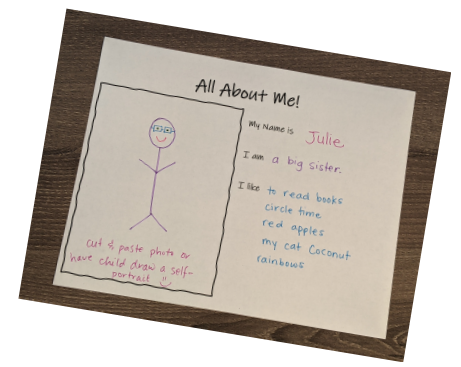
What can providers do?

- Before the child's first day, send a "Welcome" booklet or short video highlighting your home and the daily activities. This type of "tour" can help to familiarize the child with your home, you as the provider, and any other children that are in your care. They can look at the book or watch the video as often as they want.

This simple "book" can be printed, emailed, or viewed as a short video. It doesn't include the other daycare children but they could easily be added in with parental consent. Zoom in for a closer look.



What can providers do?



- Ask the parent to complete a "Getting to Know You" questionnaire telling you all about their child--How do they communicate their needs? What are their likes and dislikes? What are their cues--i.e., how do they behave when tired or when they wake up?, What is their favourite snack or lunch item? Do they like the stroller? In addition to helping you better know their child, this will reassure parents that you really *want* to better know their child.
- Prepare the other children in your daycare for the arrival of a new friend. Show them a photo, share a bit of information (new child's name, and maybe something they like), and invite them to help you create a welcome poster or piece of art. Another fun idea is to help them prepare an "All About Me" page with a photo (or self-portrait), their name, and a few of their interests or favourite things.



What can providers do?



- Be prepared to offer lots of comfort and reassurances. Expect some tears and validate the child's feelings. Help them to see the wonderful things about child care while also acknowledging that it's ok for them to miss their parent. The child might need to be held a lot--especially if they are very young. By picking them up and holding them close you are helping to establish a secure relationship--one where they will feel safe and secure in the knowledge that you are there to take care of them and respond to their needs in a kind and caring way. Similarly, asking an older child if they'd like an impromptu hug or back rub goes a long way in letting them know that they matter and that you care.
 - Read books about child care together. Reinforce positive messages, explore any worries, and reassure the children that their parents will always come to pick them up. Check out the book list below or ask your local librarian for suggestions.
-
- Give the daycare children opportunities to share their feelings and express themselves with supervised, small world play--set up the components for a pretend home daycare and invite the children to play. Small figurines, toy animals, or felt shapes can be used to make up scenes and stories. Through play, the children can explore their emotions as they experience various roles: they can be a parent at drop off or pick up, another child, or the caregiver.

What can providers do?

- Adjust your schedule as needed--for example, some caregivers skip playgroup or library time during the first few weeks to give a new child time to settle in.
- Try to be extra-organized with regard to meals, activities, snacks, etc. By preparing and planning ahead, the transition days will be less stressful for everyone.
- Maintain a consistent routine. A simple visual schedule can help all children to know "what's next" and help them to feel secure. Refer to the visual schedule throughout the day, pointing to the pictures and using simple language: "First nap, then outdoor play, then Mommy comes for Jacob!". See sample visuals below.
- Provide a welcoming environment by including items, activities, songs, phrases, and/or foods that are familiar favourites.
- Establish an end of day routine and/or goodbye ritual--with a song, little rhyme, special gesture, etc. This will cue the children to know that it's soon time to leave.



Transition Schedules

Work together with the parent to create a gentle schedule. Transitioning to full time care could easily take 1-3 weeks depending on the child's age, personality, impacts of COVID-19 isolation, what other children you have in your care, etc.

Often, caregivers will start with a 1 hour visit where the parent stays to play with their child followed by a 1 hour visit where the parent leaves the child. The 1 hour drop-off visit is increased slowly over the course of several days.

Some caregivers will include a weekend visit so that the child and caregiver can have some time together without the other daycare children being present. This also gives the caregiver an opportunity to observe how the parent and child interact together. For example: Does the parent sing while changing a diaper? Or do they play peek-a-boo? Do they tickle the toes? What is the diaper changing routine? Copying a parent's words or actions can be reassuring and comforting to a child settling into care. It's a good idea for the primary drop-off parent to be the one consistently involved in the transition phase.

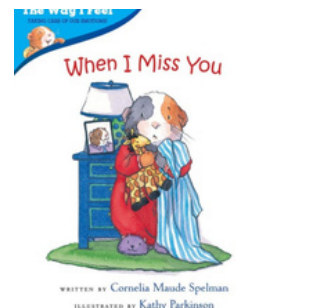
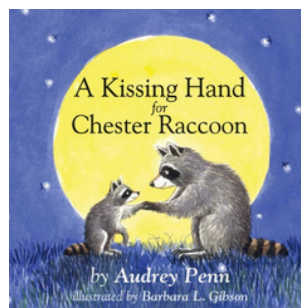
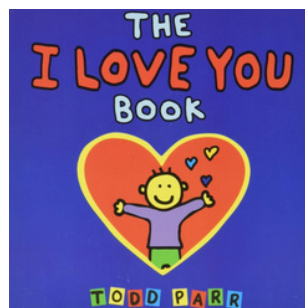
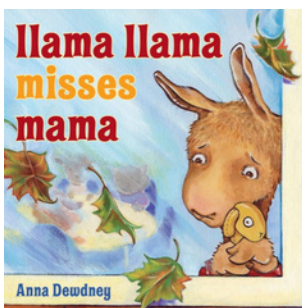
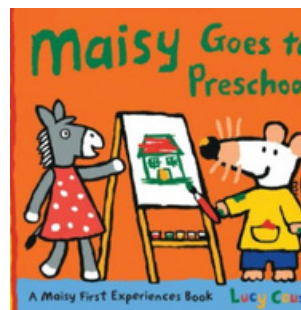
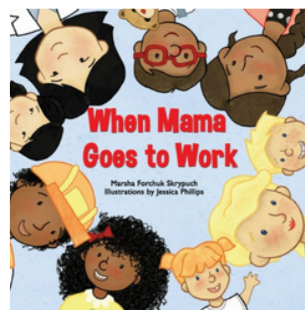
More than ever, and especially due to COVID-19, caregivers need to be fully engaged in building trust. Parents are vulnerable, many with new fears or concerns relating to the pandemic. Now is the time to be extra attentive, focusing on the needs of the child and their family.

Book List



Talk about separation and reassure little ones with a picture book.

- The Invisible String by Patrice Karst
- Llama Llama Misses Mama by Anna Dewdney
- When Mama Goes to Work by M. Forchuk Skrypuch
- The I Love You Book by Todd Parr
- Maisy Goes to Preschool by Lucy Cousins
- The Kissing Hand by Audrey Penn
- Bye-Bye Time by Elizabeth Verdick
- When I Miss You by Cornelia Maude Spelman



Ask your local librarian for other great recommendations.

Transition Rituals

There are many quick and easy little rituals that parents and providers can incorporate into a hello or goodbye transition. Used consistently, they reinforce the connection that you have with a child and help to prepare the child for the upcoming transition.

Here are a few examples:

- Special type of hug, kiss or hug/kiss combo--a kiss on each eyelid, a double squeeze hug, etc. "Hope your day is easy-peasy lemon squeezy!" (with a little hand/arm squeeze).
- High five, fist bump, special hand shake, elbow tap, or wink.
- Gentle tickle or other quick touch--a pat on the heart, or a heart drawn with your finger on the back of a child's hand.
- A special word or phrase: "To infinity and beyond! To the moon and back. See you later alligator, after a while crocodile! See ya Sunshine!" Any bit of banter that suits you and the child.
- A special wave or gesture that the child can see through a window. Blow a kiss or give a little window/door knock.
- A hello/goodbye song or rhyme--great for a caregiver to cue the start and end of each day.

A note about consent: Not all children will want or enjoy a physical gesture. Work with an older child to come up with a ritual together. For a younger or non-verbal child, watch their reactions and follow their cues closely to see what they enjoy.



Using a Visual Schedule

Consistent routines help children to feel safe and secure because their daily activities become predictable and familiar. This is helpful for all children but especially for those who are having a hard time being away from their parent. A visual schedule reinforces the routine by providing a tangible way for children to see what comes next. Seeing the sequence of the day and learning to anticipate the routine reassures children and helps them to feel a sense of control over the environment.



A visual schedule should highlight the main activities of the day without being too overwhelming. Simple graphics or actual photos of the children in the home child care environment work well. Velcro or magnets on laminated cards make it easy for you to adjust the schedule as needed and allow the children to actively participate in removing the activities from the schedule once done. If wall or fridge space is not an option, the visual schedule can be easily strung up on a line with clothespins or assembled in a binder.

Many sample visual schedules can be found online.

Creating a Visual Schedule

A simple example might include:

- indoor play
- snack
- outdoor play
- story or circle
- lunch
- nap
- snack
- outdoor play
- pick up



It's also easy to add in extra activities such as going for a walk or tasks like bathroom visits and hand washing.

The Family Wall

Another nice idea for a visual display is to create a wall of family portraits--something low, at the children's height and easily accessible--where they can see photos of themselves and their families. Also include a few photos of the children and you, the home child care provider, doing things together. This can go a long way to easing the transition by reassuring children that daycare is an extension of home--a place where the children feel comforted, safe, and cared for. A place where they belong.

Extreme Separation Anxiety and Other Anxiety Disorders:

Separation anxiety is very common and usually fades over time. It is expected that most children will experience some degree of separation anxiety, especially during the transition to child care or school. Some children however, might experience a more extreme or extended type of separation anxiety.



If you are concerned about your child's health, their anxiousness, if they seem to have excessive fears or worries, and/or if their distress is interfering with daily life, consult with your doctor or other health care professional. If you are concerned about a child in your care, share your concerns with the family and work together to best support the child.

If you're looking for online resources about children and anxiety, you can find reliable information here:

- Anxiety Canada: [Separation Anxiety](#)
- Anxiety Canada: [When Anxiety is a Problem](#)
- Sick Kids: [Anxiety Overview](#)
- CHEO: [Anxiety and Stress Management](#)



Anxiety
CANADA

CHEO

SickKids®

Partners in Caring:

It can be difficult for parents to return to work and entrust their child to someone else's care. Successful, quality care involves a partnership which benefits the child, the parent, and the caregiver.

Knowing that the transition to child care can be emotional, and expecting that many children will experience some degree of separation anxiety, parents and caregivers can work together to ease the transition and support children with care and kindness.

Positive interactions between a child and caregiver form the basis of a supportive and responsive relationship. It is within this relationship that children grow and flourish.





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