

# Saying goodbye

Starting nursery can be difficult for children and their parents. **Annette Rawstrone** offers some advice on how to make the transition as smooth as possible

**A**ttending nursery for the first time is an exciting milestone, but it can also feel extremely daunting for both you and your child.

It is often the first time you have been separated for any significant period of time and it is a huge step to entrust your child to someone you hardly know. For many parents, the first day of nursery also signifies a return to work, which can make it more difficult as you all get used to a new routine.

It is important to reassure yourself that your child is being cared for by trained early years professionals who are well practised at comforting and settling new children. There is also lots you can do before the first day.

## WHAT IS A KEY PERSON?

All Ofsted-registered early years settings in England must follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), a statutory framework that sets standards for the care, learning and development of children from birth to five years old.

The EYFS requires that all children have a named key person. This will be the main point of contact for you and your child and will provide you with updates on how your child is settling. Many nurseries also have apps where activities, routines and photographs are shared with parents.

## HOW TO PREPARE

■ If you have rarely been apart from your child, it can help to have short periods of separation so you both get used to it. If possible, leave your child with your partner or a trusted friend or relative for a few hours. This can reduce feelings of anxiety and help make goodbyes feel less overwhelming.

■ Take advantage of the settling-in sessions that your nursery offers. Often these begin with a visit and play together, followed by you leaving them with their key person for gradually longer periods. These sessions are important for you to get to know the staff and the routines of the nursery. They also enable your child to become familiar with the setting and, essentially, start forming attachments with staff.

■ Children pick up on your emotions, so approach the first day with a calm and upbeat attitude to help your child regard it as a positive experience. Discuss the toys they will be able to play with and reassure them with simple statements like, 'You'll have lots of fun and I'll be back to pick you up soon.'

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It is a good idea not to rush saying goodbye, but also not to linger

■ Children are never too young to enjoy cuddling up with picturebooks, so you can introduce some to support the upcoming transition. For example, *Owl Babies* by Martin Waddell and *Olu's Teacher* by Jamel C. Campbell.

■ Prepare the night before by laying out clothes and packing a bag with essentials – your key person will advise on what is needed. Make sure your child is wearing clothes that you don't mind them exploring in and getting dirty.

## ON THE DAY

Aim to leave home in plenty of time so you don't rush saying goodbye to your child. You may be tempted to linger, but it is often better to give a quick hug and a kiss and say goodbye. Don't be tempted to sneak off when your child is not looking as your disappearance can make them more anxious and clingy.

It is normal to be upset, but try to hold back any tears until you are away from your child so you don't upset them. Talking about your feelings to other parents who have been through the same experience can provide comfort and reassurance.

Remember that every child is different and expresses their emotions in different ways. Don't be hurt if your child goes into their key person's open arms without a fuss, it doesn't mean that they love you any less. Likewise, if your child cries, it doesn't mean that they will not settle – phone the nursery later to check how they are doing.

During the early days, some children may seem clingier or more emotional at home. This is normal as they process their new routine. Support them with extra cuddles and reassurance along with a familiar home routine. ■

