

Tip Sheets

Supporting Secure Attachments Alongside Families and Within Child Care Settings



In the United States, many children spend time in child care programs weekly. This means there are numerous opportunities for families and early care and education programs to support the development of a secure attachment pattern.

Continuity of Care

The best way to support a child's secure attachment is through continuity of care, which may be fostered:

- Naturally
- Through assigning a primary teacher

Naturally

Continuity of care may happen naturally within the child's family or the family child care program when there is only one adult. This allows the child to rely on the adult and naturally form an attachment as a predictable relationship and routine is established.

Assign a Primary Teacher

Having children assigned to a primary teacher or caregiver in a center-based program is helpful. When a child has one adult that is their "main

caregiver," an attachment may be made quicker than forming attachments to multiple adults in the classroom.

It is important to note that all adults should still be willing and available to help each child.

If the child's main caregiver or "person" is gone or not available in a care center, it is important to acknowledge this with the child and explain why they are gone.

You may want to show the child a photo of the person and give a simple reason why they are gone and when they will be back. For example, you can say, "Teacher Sara went to Florida for vacation. While she is gone, I will be helping you. Teacher Sara will be back on Monday."

If the main caregiver knows they will be gone, providing a "heads up" to the children can be helpful. This may sound like, "Tomorrow I will not be here. I am going to visit a friend. I will miss you when I am gone. While I am gone Miss Annie will take care of you. I will be back on Friday and we can read your favorite story."

It is important that children feel cared for by people who are attuned to their individual likes and needs: Sally, loves green Jell-O; when Tommy rocks side to side, it means he wants to get a hug; when Gretta gets sand in her shoe she might scream; etc.

Children may have a more difficult time transitioning away from their primary caregiver at times. This may be impacted by the child's age, stage of development, and personal history.

Understand, Interpret, and Support Attachment Behaviors

Early care and education programs can help parents understand, interpret, and support attachment behaviors in children in the following ways:

Check-In with Parents

At drop-off and pick-up, early care and education providers can take this opportunity to explain to families the behaviors that sometimes occur (clinging to parents, not wanting to leave, etc.).

Clinging to Parents

Children may cry and protest drop-off time. This can be very difficult and sometimes frustrating. It is helpful to assure the parents that this is typical behavior. Oftentimes, once the parent leaves, the child stops crying and becomes engaged with the daily routine of fun and learning.

Early care and education providers can explain that the behavior is the child's way to express that the child wants to be with the parent and will miss them.

Transitional Objects

Transitional objects may assist a child's transition(s) from a primary attachment figure to another caregiver. This may be a blanket, stuffed animal, or another object that represents the safety and security the child feels when with their primary attachment figure.

Allowing a child to have this object when they feel scared, sad, angry, or tired may assist in the child regulating their emotions.

What to Do When There Are Concerns

- Visit with the parents about your concerns and observations.
- Be sure to have a consistent routine for the child to follow.
- Have a "calm down" or "safe space" for the child to go to, to regain composure during big emotions.
- Visual schedules and cues may help the child.
- Develop social scripts for times that are difficult for the child.
- Encourage the parents to visit with the child's doctor for ideas and assistance.
- When the frequency, intensity, and the duration of big emotions seems concerning, seek assistance from programs such as Help Me Grow (www.helpmegrow.org).



For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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