

# Helping Your Child Adjust to Child Care: Child Care 3<sup>1</sup>

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Figure 1.  
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Almost 13 million of the 18 million children younger than five years of age in the U.S. are in some form of regular childcare (Overturf Johnson, 2002). This means that millions of parents are finding ways to help their children adjust to being away from Mom or Dad and get used to a new routine and situation. Child development experts recommend a number of strategies, particularly in the early weeks of care.

Parents can help their child prepare for care by talking about what the child will do during the time in care and when they will see the child next. An older toddler may like to pretend she or he is the parent taking you to child care. With younger children, “play disappearing/reappearing games such as peekaboo and hide-and-seek” (Zero to Three, n.d., a). These games show your child that while things and people may go away, they come back. Emphasize the message that “Mommy [or Daddy] may go away, but [they] always [come] back” (Zero to Three, a). Children’s books about children in care can also be helpful.

The goodbye time is very important. When it’s time to leave “don’t linger or show worry” (Zero to Three, n.d., a). Usually, “when parents say a brief, upbeat good-bye, their children stop crying and adjust more quickly” (Zero to Three, b). Have a special routine to help your child feel secure and make the transition easier. This might be exchanging a big hug and kiss and saying, “See you later, alligator” (Zero to Three).

To keep things going smoothly in care, stay involved with the childcare provider (Child Care Aware, 2001-2006). Meet regularly and ask questions to make sure that things are going well. The more confident you are, the more relaxed your child is likely to be.

Listening, learning, and living together: it’s the science of life. “Family Album” is a co-production of University of Florida IFAS Extension, the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, and of WUFT-FM. If you’d

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