

PORTLAND

lifestyle & family

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Ask Ariel: Day Care Hater



by Ariel Frager

Dear Ariel,

My preschooler hates going to day care. He cries and kicks and hangs onto my legs every time I leave. It makes me late for work and leaves me upset for the rest of the day. What can I do to make this time easier on both of us?

—Daily Heartbreak

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Dear DH,

This letter really resonates with me. When we first started taking our then 20-month-year-old son to childcare, he wailed every morning when I dropped him off. I often walked away in tears and seriously questioned the wisdom of returning to work after my maternity leave. The day care center our son attended assured me that his tears dried up almost as soon as I left the room. By the time I reached my car, he was happily interacting with the teachers and other kids, but I was a wreck.

There are a couple of questions I have for you, Daily Heartbreak. How long does your child remain upset after you leave? Have you noticed any other times that your child expresses separation anxiety? Do you have any doubts about the care he is receiving? As heartbreaking as it was to leave my crying son every morning, I was always reassured when I found him playing happily at pick-up time. What your child is like at the end of the day will help you figure out if the issue is short-lived anxiety when separating from you or something else.

In order to ease the separation, consider giving your child something special of yours to take care of for the day. For example, he can care for a piece of jewelry or some other item that is important to you. This will help your child feel empowered and perhaps distracted by the responsibility, as well as comforted by the item throughout the day. Talk to your child the night before and explain that you need his help the next day, taking care of something valuable of yours. At drop-off time, hand over the item and make the time about taking care of the valuable thing, not about the separation. This will hopefully shift the focus of that vulnerable time to one of trust and caring, rather than anxiety.

0 SHARES

Ariel Frager

Ariel Frager is a school counselor and has a private therapy practice that specializes in treating children, adolescents and



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families. She lives in Portland with her husband, son, dog and kitty cat.

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