Helping Your Child Adjust to Daycare

You've just started your child in a new learning center. You're thrilled with his new childcare provider, but he doesn't want anything to do with her. He protests loudly when it's time for you to say good-bye, and you drive to work feeling miserable about the entire situation.

No miracle cure exists for the daycare blues that many children experience when starting a new arrangement, but there is plenty you can do to make the transition as stress-free as possible for your child. Here are a few tips.

• Send along his favorite stuffed animal or a picture of his family. Your child may find it easier to adjust to a particular care program having a favored toy or picture to hold when he's feeling anxious or upset.

• Arrive at daycare at least 15 minutes ahead of time so that you can help your child settle into an activity before you have to head off to work. He'll be less likely to protest your departure if he's having fun at the arts-and-crafts table or measuring sand in the sandbox.

• Pay attention to your own body language when saying good-bye to your child. If you're feeling uncertain about the new arrangement, you could be conveying some of your own ambivalence and anxiety to your little one.

• Resist the temptation to sneak out the door when your child isn't looking. You'll simply create more problems for both of you. Fearing that you're going to disappear again, your child may become unwilling to let you out of his sight for a minute -- even when the two of you are at home.

• See if your child reacts as strongly if your partner or a trusted friend drops him off instead. He might actually be protesting your departure more than the particular childcare environment.

• Ask your child's caregiver if she can provide insights about the problem. For instance, maybe he doesn't like one of the other children in his group or is having difficulty settling down for his afternoon nap.

• Avoid making other changes to your child's routine while he's getting used to a new childcare setting. This is not a good time to move him from his crib into a bed or to start toilet training, for example.

• Accept the fact that it takes time for young children to adjust to a new childcare setting. And some children take longer than others.