***A proven transition tool for you and your child(ren).***

Regardless of whether your child experiences obvious separation anxiety from you or from another parent or carer during drop off, the ideas in this article will help your child(ren) feel more confident while they are away from you. It will assist them with their general well-being while at kindergarten or school, helping them play and follow the lead of the teachers.

Please remember this is an exhaustive list. Pick and choose the ones that resonate with you and those that you will initially find the most easy to do. Ideally choose at least one from each section.

Sometimes I will refer to the word ‘school’ when I am referring to ‘kindergarten’ or ‘school’ for ease.

**Detailed Information Provision**

 There is lots of information about the world that we as adults have that our children do not have.  Sometimes it is hard to remember how little they know.  My first set of ideas could be used in preparation for a first day of kindergarten or school (for at least a few weeks prior), when they move to a new class, if they say they do not like school or are not wanting to go more often even if everyone except them thinks they are ready and / or just for fun.  They can also be used to glean information about what is going on for them while they are at school without asking them directly, as children cannot sometimes verbalise the true meaning behind their feelings.

**1. Provide them with as much information as you can about the time they will be at school**

For example in kindergarten or school, "When you arrive each day you will, take off your shoes, put on your slippers and hang your bag on your hook.  Inside your bag we'll put spare clothes in case you get dirty or don't make it to the toilet in time.  Every child's hook has a gorgeous individually drawn picture with their name next to it.  How cool is that :) I wonder what yours will look like? When you arrive the teacher will say hi and greet you.  They will most likely already be doing some activities. Maybe chopping, cooking, gardening, ironing or something else.   You can choose to join in with him/her and the other children who have chosen that play, or you can find something else inside or outside or someone else to play with. It's your choice. You will call your teachers by their first name and sometimes the teachers sing as they work. You can sing too if you want. The first few times I'll stay the whole time if you want me to.  I won't be staying there the whole time after the first few times as Mummy's aren't allowed to go to school :) I’m too big :) but I'll stay until we're both ready for me to leave. We can talk about how long I'll stay each day in the car before we get there. At some point later in the morning everyone sits in circle time together.  Each activity flows on to the next one so you may find yourself eating and you're not sure how you got there. :) You'll have a meal every day you go to school at a table with everyone and you're allowed to sit in any of the seats. You'll need to pour your own water when you're thirsty. Do you want to practice pouring before you start? You'll have a rest after lunch and you'll be allowed to take your security item out of the bag while you rest.  Other times it will stay in your bag... etc

The more detail you provide, the better, however don’t share it all at once. You can source information by asking questions of other parents, the teachers, principal and using resources such as the school website, blog and handbook.

A school principal Gay Wales told me a story about a child’s lateral and literal mind.  A four year old asked his parents “how long will I go to school for?”  His parents replied “until you are 18”.  On the first day of school the child reminded his parents to come and get him from school when he was 18.  He obviously and sadly thought he was saying goodbye to them for 14 years.  We can’t interpret their needs all the time, but it’s so important to try and see the world from the perspective of our young children.

**2. Peruse the kindergarten or school website with your children**

Paying special attention to the photos within them.  Talk about the multitude of feelings the children may feel during the course of a day and what may cause them. Listen to your children carefully and do more listening than talking. Watch any videos the school may have on their website. Use YouTube for more kindergarten and primary school videos. Try to find videos that look like your child(ren)’s school room. Listen to your children carefully when they put forward their views and do more listening than talking. Read all school correspondence (emails or letters) to your child(ren) if they are interested.

**3. Make a picture handbook with your children doing activities they are likely to do during the course of a day**

This is designed to show the kids how the day operates.  They may ask to look at it over and over again.  Make “I wonder…” statements speculating about what will happen there if you don’t know some parts. eg “I wonder which teacher and children will choose to do the cooking?”. Ask the child(ren) what they would like to wear to kindergarten or school (providing two options that you are happy with will suffice, Solter), which clothes they would like to have as spare in their bag, which types of play they may enjoy. This will give them a sense of empowerment even before they are there. It is also possible to design a handbook with all the steps needed to get a child ready for kindergarten or school.  A photo of them doing each activity – eg getting dressed, putting on shoes, packing bag, cleaning teeth. Then the parent can refer the child back to the book rather than tell them the next step each day.

I always try to make time for specific play or information requests made by my daughter and let her lead them and direct me.  My daughter Darcy regularly shows me what experiences in her life she has had and may not yet understand fully (Solter, Rose). She does this while playing. I see play as an important way to express herself. I believe she knows what she needs to learn and work through. I also often let her direct me in play (Solter, Rose). I do exactly what she asks of me once again trusting she knows what she needs to learn and work through. If I cannot play with her immediately, I will tell her when I am able to. If she is content playing by herself I do not interrupt her. I also make myself available by quietly watching her play when I can to see her current interests. I do this so I can offer other activities that may be slightly different but practice the same skills.

**4. Take your child to watch other children being dropped off**

I took Darcy to watch the kids being dropped off before she had to experience this herself.  From outside the school on the grass nature strip we watched families walk in together, and the parent / carer come out alone. The Steiner school you attend will most likely let you come inside and watch your children settle before you say goodbye.  Chat to the kindergarten or school about your and their desires around this.  Tell your child what the school said and what you are willing to do.  Tell your child you'll always come back for them.  Explain to your children what time the parents will come back and collect the children.  Tell them if they'll be the only one at that time getting picked up or if others will be collected at that time too. Before they start at school for their first day you could have the child watch the picking up part of the process too from outside on the lawn. We also drove past the school and pointed it out prior to Darcy's first day, visited the school once in the holidays and peeked into her new classroom window – once we knew what room that was. I plan to go through this process whenever Darcy moves classes in the future. Next time she’ll likely be 6 and a half. In this café I’d ask her if she wants to do it rather than orchestrate it for her.

**5. Tell the truth about where you, your partner and siblings will be while your school age child is at school**

Kids can instantly tell in your face if you are lying. So many years of being non-verbal develops these skills and setting a behavioural example can actually make a difference in a child’s development and adherence to family values. Explain why you believe it is important that they attend school and why it is important you get some time out so you can be a better parent or why you choose to work eg to pay for food, the house or the child’s toys.  It’s pretty common advice to reassure them that you will always come back for them. However to providing more detail than this I see as important.  Saying that you will try and be on time but what will happen if you aren't. Or be very clear each morning and the night before who will come and get them and why and let them express how they feel about this change. Literally any change from the usual routine could cause anxiety in a child.  Even parking in a different spot for example.

To further help my daughter know I’d come back I bought Darcy a pocket watch and stuck tiny stickers  indicating the time when I would be back for her.  She couldn't read time (aged 2.5) but she knew from the conversation that I'd come back and she had a tangible symbol with her representing this hooked on her school bag.

Also telling the truth about when school is going back, why there are holidays, why they might have to miss a day of school gives them a sense of trust in you.  After holidays or illness looking into emotions if they are nervous, doing practice and role plays again can help them get back into the school routine again more quickly.

**6. Buy or borrow a fiction child’s book about first school experiences**

So they can see that others do it and it’s a normal part of most children’s experience of growing up. Make the “I wonder….” statements about the specific things you do not know about the school but wish you did and give them choice (Solter) about their school experience - only in areas in which you feel comfortable. Like choice between two sets of clothes (if they do not wear uniform at your Steiner), choice of undies if they do wear a uniform, choice of bag they use, choice of hat. But only if they want the choice.

**7. Send your child(ren) to school with familiar and easy to use items**

There is a tendency for families to buy special new things for children when they start kindergarten or school.  I understand it is letting the children know that this is an important and potentially exciting step for them, however, I believe the school experience is unfamiliar and children benefit by having things around them that are familiar and that they have confidence using.  Using an old school bag or letting them use a new one as a toy for weeks prior is very beneficial, talk about the food that is prepared at the school and ask them if they would like to practice eating that type of food, dress them in comfortable clothes that they have worn for a long time, they can master and they are not worried about getting dirty, put even simpler ones to redress themselves in in their school bag as they are likely to be in a rush and perhaps even feeling emotional if they need to change while at school, purchase shoes they can easily take on and off and have them practice putting on their slippers.  Tell them if their slippers will need to be left at school. These sorts of things will all add to feelings of empowerment and confidence in your child(ren) at school. The more familiar these things are, the more confident your child will feel with them.

**Teacher Attachment**

One of the first things I did was to help my child attach to her teachers. We are lucky at our school that we know so far ahead of time who our child(ren)’s teacher will be.  There is no harm in asking the school directly if they have not told you who the teachers will be. They can only say no. It is also beneficial that Steiner children nearly always have the same teacher for multiple years.

Attachment can and does often happen naturally, however, there are things you can do to help quicken the process.  Children who are well attached to at least one parent or carer are likely to be able to be safely and successfully attached to their teachers.  Primarily it is adults who provide safety for children while at school and it is primarily adults from whom your child will need to take direction and role model.  Children ideally need to feel important and know their teachers.  You can help them feel this even before the first day of school. For so many other reasons past the scope of this article, teacher attachment will always be my goal with my daughter during her school experience and this is how I do it.  For more information on the importance of teacher attachment please read, Hold onto Your Kids by Gordon Neufeld.

Signs of attachment could be; your child wants to be liked by the teacher, or wishes the teacher could live with them, or wonders things about the teacher.  They may not say anything though and still be well attached.

**8.  Obtain a photo of your teachers**

I got mine from the school magazine but you could ask the teachers if its ok to take their photo the first day you meet them telling them the use. Or take a photo of the photos the school may have up in reception or on the website. Ideally prior to starting school, show them the photo and explain who they are. Have these photos on display for as long as the child wants them to be. It is possible for children to connect well with their teachers before they have even met them.

**9. Chat casually about what you know and don’t know about your child’s teacher(s)**

There are things you can say in casual conversation to children to help them attach.

I saw Nirmala smile at you yesterday.  I think she likes you.

Loretta told me that she thinks you’re fitting in well at school. She sees you talk more often now.

I wonder what Jan is having for breakfast?

Did you know Anne has 5 children?  Wow she must love kids.

Did you know Belinda has one child? That’s just like our family.

One of the best ways I’ve developed to attach a child to a teacher is to find parallels between the child and the teacher’s life.  “I saw Loretta wearing pink the other day that’s your favourite colour”.  Manjolini told me she likes bananas. That is your favourite fruit.”

If child(ren) feel liked by their teacher(s) and they like their teacher(s) they will more likely feel a sense of attachment, leading to a sense of belonging and will more likely thrive at school. They are more likely to imitate their behaviour which is one of the foundations of the Steiner model.  It is possible for children to connect well to with other children thus providing somewhat of a sense of safety also.  But I believe for several reasons, past the scope of this article, that teachers are exceedingly more important as attachment figures.  (Refer to Hold onto Your Kids, Gordon Neufeld)

**10. Use dolls or other toys to represent key people in child led role plays**

When Darcy was two and a half she was about to start a Preschool program for 2 hours twice a week  She had never been left with anyone except a grandparent at her own home prior to this.  I had previously purchased 4 cheap wooden dolls from Kmart after reading about child-directed play by Aletha Solter. (It would be possible to use other toys instead eg I’ve used dinosaurs with another child) I told her this is the Roshni teacher doll, this is the Mummy doll and this is the Darcy doll. Within 15 seconds Darcy had made the Darcy doll say “I need to go to the toilet, what do I do?”  She had only been toileting for a month. I picked up the Roshni teacher doll and walked it towards Darcy doll.  I made the teacher say “I’ll help you”.  Then Darcy stopped the game and ran off.  The first day of pre-school Darcy was outside playing and she went over to Roshni and told her she needed to use the toilet. It was such an obvious fear that was resolved with a 15 second game. Roshni later mentioned to me Darcy’s obvious confidence for a first day.

If I was doing this game with a 6-8 year old child I would call it a role play but for toys. Or it would be possible for family members to act out possible scenarios.  The child playing whomever they want and them telling you who you all are and let them give you direction as to what to say. Let them lead it.  Once you’ve done this for a while try to create laughter by getting things wrong. Stop if your child is unresponsive to your silliness and go back to their way.

**11. Setting up a home school**

We did this with 6-8 activities on a low book shelf. It may lead to conversations and will help the child feel safe and practice skills needed for school.  We have 8 activites (rotating) for our (home) school.  You could have things in baskets like at Steiner school. I've placed this bookshelf next to a small wooden table and chairs so Darcy can practice sitting at a table for eating like at school, Darcy very proudly still sometimes introduces people to her school even now and it’s been there almost a year.

**12. Practice with the items your child will bring and use at school**

With this home school it is a good idea to practice what will happen at school eg hang school bag on a hook, put on and take off shoes and slippers, open and close the bag, know what’s inside the bag, pulling up their own trousers/ undies, wiping their own bottom, putting on a jacket and hat, practice pouring from a jug similar to the ones at kindergarten and school with similar size glasses.

**13. Introduce or use a security object to be left in the bag at school**

While you are waiting for attachment to occur with a teacher, objects can be introduced or familiar ones used to remind them of home and their family (Solter).  Some Steiner kindergarten and schools allow children to bring a security object.  The children may be allowed and choose to bring it out during rest time and leave it in their bag for the duration of the time.

In all other circumstances except separation, I see security objects as less important. Aware Parenting – by Aletha Solter has tools that actively reduce the need for them gently.

 My daughter has never had a security object so I bought a cheap owl locket necklace (Ebay $1) and we drew a picture of our family to put inside.  She enthusiastically put it on herself the first day and never wore it again. I assumed this meant she was confident enough not to need it. You could put a sticky note inside their bag with a funny note or drawing, you could put a tiara in their bag just for fun, put a family picture in the bag.  Anything that won’t interfere with their school experience but will remind them of home will help. Another two children I worked with suggested a small rock that they put in their pockets. Both were very enthusiastic about it, one went out especially with his Dad to get it, and enjoyed making sure they had it with them upon leaving the house prior to school.

**14. Do not ask children for information about what happened at school after school**

Unless they volunteer information I find this interferes with their experience of school.  It may make them feel pressured to tell you what you want to hear.  Often when we ask questions, the answers we seek are not for them but for us. If you don't mind ranking parts of the day, making a habit of asking them what was the best and the worst bit of the day at bedtime will suffice if you really want to know.  This is of course is fine. Being enthusiastic when they tell you things about their school experience in the key.  Try to know the activity names, children’s names, rhythms of the day eg what time is circle time, what happens during, before and after it, which song do they use to move the children into the next activity? Do the best you can so you can understand any information they volunteer.  Mostly just listening is all they need. They don’t need advice.  If Darcy seems unsure I try to remember to ask her “how do you think you could solve the problem?” and brainstorm ideas with her. If you feel compelled to talk directly after school tell them what you got up to while you were away from them and tell them that you missed them (if you did).  This will show children indirectly that it is a normal part of life to debrief after a separation.  Darcy now at four tells me lots about school.  I’m so glad I trusted she would do it herself when she was ready.

**Enhancing Child/Carer Bonds**

It is inevitable that your child(ren) will be away from you for periods of time, however, if the child feels closer emotionally and physically to you directly prior to saying goodbye this process will be easier for them.

**15. Connecting with children emotionally and physically upon wakeup**

(Solter, Rose and Neufeld) - especially the child who is likely to hesitate when saying goodbye.  Upon waking take them to a special place in the house or crawl into bed with them and just connect with them for just 5 minutes and focus entirely on them and do whatever they want as long as no one gets hurt.  You can do two children at once.  Tell them it’s only for 5 minutes but you’d like to say a special good morning every morning. This process helps with getting them ready faster too as they are more agreeable if they feel connected to you.

**16. Play separation games such as hide and seek and chase**

There are lots of games that have been designed with separation in mind.  Peekaboo, hide and seek, chase are the most obvious ones that are all about disappearing and finding people again (Solter).  There are numerous variations of each. If you introduce these games and then play them with as much enthusiasm as you can muster (with eye contact) they will help children separate from you. Children often laugh during them. Some others that I have developed are;

a. Turn around playfully in the car and pretend that you thought you had already dropped them off at school.  “What are you doing here? I thought I’d dropped you off already.”

b. Play homemade cubbies and pretend to be shocked that you lost them inside it,

c. Pretend that you cannot see them when they are right in front of you (“where did my daughter go? she was right her a minute ago”),

d. Asking someone if they’ve seen your child when they are right in front of you,

e. Jump under a blanket and try to pretend to be scared that you cannot see them.

If any of these games (or others you may invent) don’t get enthusiasm or laughter or a desire for more play, move onto another game.  I believe children know what they need to play to learn the skills they need to learn or debrief the experiences they’ve had. Play is such an important part of childhood.  If we as parents can find the enthusiasm to play when children ask to play these games over and over or if we initiate a game and they play with enthusiasm, then this is a wonderful gift we can give our children. They will remember us for it.

I feel it's important to acknowledge that finding the energy to play with your children can feel like a chore.  I would like to offer the knowledge that if you can laugh with your children you'll feel less tired afterwards.  Or if you can cry when you need to telling them that you're not crying because of them but you're just feeling sad.  It actually gives you energy to keep playing and you will not feel tired for hours afterwards.

**17. Be playful about things that may happen at school that may cause them unease**

This is very beneficial to show children it’s ok to make mistakes and not be perfect (Solter).  eg playfully drop a basket of dolls spilling them all over the floor or struggle to pick it up with a big smile on your face and say "Oh no what have I done/ I can’t do it and pretend to cry".  Intentionally spilling water when you pour from a jug in a space you don't mind getting wet can generate lots of laughter.  If your child finds this amusing, or laughs, or asks you to do it again, do it exactly the same way over and over until they ask you to stop or move on.  It’s ok for you to laugh too. Laughter diffuses inevitable feelings of powerlessness that we all experience in life. Do not use laughter games if the child is crying but in times of general play. They can be some of the best use of your time to aid children at school.

**18. Play power reversal games**

Children see that parents decide they go to school.  Children see that parents have all the power in this.  So introducing games where your child gets to be the scary one, the strong one, the powerful one and you’re the weak/ disempowered one, can really help them laugh (Solter).  Keep doing whatever makes them laugh over and over (as long as they are not crying) and it will diffuse their feelings of powerlessness;

a. Give them a magic wand or a remote control that has the power to make you do things;

b. Pretend to be scared of the big scary monster that they are, try not to be the scary one unless they ask you to be – even then wait for them to tell you to be even scarier before you try it. If they are shrieking you have gone too far and need to take it back one level until they are simply laughing again; and

c. Get them to put you in a pretend cage and beg to get out.

See any work by Dr Aletha Solter or Dr Marion Rose.  They are masters at this type of play.

**19. Introduce 5-15 minutes of regular special time each day/ week with each child**

You could also introduce a regular special time before you leave the house (Neufeld, Rose, Solter, Wipfler) ideally in the mornings. Afternoons will of course suffice and is maybe a better time for doing this with one child at a time.  If you feel time deficient using the time in the car or during the walk to school can also be very playful and provide the connection your child needs to say goodbye to you. We do special ‘Darcy and Mum’ time once we are totally ready for school at home and use the time in the car and during the walk to school – I factor this time into our planning. At home prior to leaving we do special time for ten minutes and we sometimes time it on my mobile with an alarm.  My job is to do nothing except what Darcy wants with her, which isn’t always easy.  Darcy’s job is to have some power over what is going to happen for ten minutes.  I tell Darcy once it’s over it will be time to put her bag on and get into the car.  I am very strict about this.  She is allowed to be disappointed that special time is over. I give her a big cuddle and say “it’s ok to be disappointed, you wanted to keep playing”. She may cry and I embrace and support her in this disappointment.

**20. Listen fully and with empathy to your child(ren)’s disappointment, frustration and fears**

I believe emotions are a natural part of the human experience. I find Darcy tends to show a lot of them and often. I have read that it is important to listen to your children’s disappointment, frustration, feeling and fears when they are crying, hesitant, angry, whingeing, sulking, saying they don’t like school or do not want to go to school.  Tell them you hear them and quickly repeat what you hear them saying with empathy and then stop talking and let them talk or express. Which isn’t always easy. You could say "I hear you don't want to go to school, I’m here for you while you need to be sad about that" or simply “It’s ok to be upset” I found school overwhelming at times too”. Do not provide any reasons as to why they should not feel the way they feel as it invalidates them. The above list of often triggering behaviour for parents by children, provides in my eyes valid emotions and valid methods of expression for children (and sometimes adults). For many children the unknown parts of school can be overwhelming as can the normal things that happen at school. It may also be something else they are upset about and cannot articulate what is the real reason. I find it’s more beneficial to let Darcy simply be upset rather than trying to get to the bottom of why. I cannot likely solve it for her (that is not what I believe she needs) so listening is the key. For example, when Darcy cries I stay with her and allow her to finish crying. Afterwards she is agreeable, gentle, calm, fears disappear, sleeps and eats well, plays happily by herself, shares, content and most importantly to me connected to people and in her body.

If you cannot listen anymore in that moment tell them this and the reason why. Then tell them when you will be able to listen again. You could tell them exactly what time or tell them that you will listen after another activity occurs. Say something like "I'm going to stop your crying now while we go to school, you can cry/ be sad in the car if you want on the way or I'll listen to you upset later after school" Try to keep this promise every time.  This is what you can also say at the classroom door if they are crying.  "I promise I will listen to your cries later after school" Or “I will listen to your upset at 2pm today once we are home”. Children are less likely to cry at the classroom door if you can do this for them in the safety and ease of home, the car or even outside the school gates.

The theories of laughter and cries being highly beneficial when someone is close to you were developed by Dr Aletha Solter. Dr. Marion Rose, Transformation through Mothering, says that fully listening and connecting with our children when they cry, rage and laugh are the most important things we can do for them. Beyond Blue recommends teenagers schedule time to be sad at a later time if they feel compelled to do not do it at the initial time of upset. I cannot see why younger children will not benefit from the same technique.

**21. Try not to take them to too many activities after school at least initially**

Take them home and let them reconnect with you for a time before you go somewhere else or if this is impossible spend five minutes playing in the car or perhaps on a rug next to the car and have a cuddle.  If the child wants to play at school after class time encourage this. They may trying to make an unfamiliar place more familiar with you there.

**22. If after school pickup you can let them play in the playground at school if this is allowed**

Try to be available for them if they need to be with you rather than chatting to the other parents or teachers.  They've been with other children for hours so they may not want to continue to play with them. If they do want to play with the children more that is ok of course too but try and offer some special time for the two of you if you can.

**23. Experiment with slightly different drop off times within the window you are allowed to drop the child(ren) off**

Being the first child in the school room or the last one can help with feelings of confidence. Try not to have your child regularly be the last one to get picked up in any one time slot. If you are late tell them why and how you’ll prevent it happening again.

**24. Know as many of the activity names, children’s names, and as much of the daily, weekly, monthly and yearly school routine/ rhythms as you can**

When they choose to discuss these things with you do I recommend much more listening than talking with your child(ren). I definitely still over talk.  It takes consciousness and practice to stop.

Children who are happy are more likely to be able to absorb the rhythms of the class, listen to and follow their teachers, and be caring to themselves and other children.  Children who are staring off into space (for long periods) during their time at school may be disconnected from their environment.  If they are crying at drop off or saying they do not want to go to kindergarten or school or crying at home they may be showing you that they have feelings about their kindergarten or school experience (or other things). If your child(ren) regularly doesn’t listen to or role model their teachers or is having trouble fitting into the class routine/rhythmns these may also be signs of unease. If there have been big or small changes at home children can project them into their school experience. These feelings are all perfectly normal, however, there are many things that you, as their most trusted person, can do to help reduce negative feelings and help them have the most positive schooling experience.  I’ve listed many for your use in this article and you’ll most likely have others you’ve used or your family or friends have used.

It may seem trivial to us adults but a child who has spilled paint on her shoes just once or had a toileting incident may then say she doesn’t want to go to kindergarten or school anymore.  They often can’t say why.  It may be they didn’t know what to do, felt like they had failed, was embarrassed at making a mistake.   There are things you can do to reassure them with or without words by providing information, playing and connecting with them emotionally to show this is a normal human experience. It’s normal to feel some unease around making mistakes but children may not experience life that way.

I would like to reassure you that separation anxiety is an expected phenomenon in a child who is well attached to their parents. To me, it means that your child feels safest with you.  This is a similar phenomenon to children showing their trickiest behaviour to their closest caregiver.  This is because they trust this person the most.  This is why I believe children cry at drop off at school and then stop crying quite soon after the parent leaves.  It’s not because the sadness has necessarily gone away it is because they don't have their special person present who can give them the undivided time they need to show their sadness. This is not to be overly concerned about, it is inevitable that children will not be able to fully express emotions at school, they can wait. Your child(ren) will let you know how they feel after school, but these are things that you can do with them at home to help them feel even safer while they are there. These tools can also be varied for use with leaving children with grandparents, babysitters, child-care or if the child prefers one parent.

**25. Discuss your feelings about dropping off your child(ren) and any other negative school experiences you had when you were younger with another adult**

My last piece of advice, which I have also practiced myself, came later to me from Gay Wales (a school principal).  In all her years of experience Gay has noticed that if the parent or carer is hesitant at drop off that the child is more likely to be so.  Gay suggests that a child can tell if the parent's body language is saying "stay with me" while their words are saying "you'll be ok, I'm going now".  I recommend having another parent, friend or relative with whom you can share your feelings about your child's experiences at school and exploring your own memories of being dropped off somewhere as a child. This can help your head and your heart match, thus protecting your children from your own feelings.  This concept is called a listening partner.  (Rose, Solter, Wipfler)

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As a small child I believe I cried at every kindergarten drop off for 6 months.  I was determined to reduce the likelihood of a similar experience for my daughter. I did everything contained in this document and probably more numerous times. It was time consuming.  However, upon reflection, I am so pleased that I gave Darcy the best start I knew how.  I know I did the best I could with the information I had at the time.  There is always more to learn. Very importantly any negative feelings around experiences my child has had at school can be reversed using these methods.  I'm so thankful for that.

I believe I am the first author to provide such a comprehensive list of ideas for families to try to enhance the school experience for their children.  I also believe I am the first to say that thriving at school is more likely when 3 main things occur: detailed information provision to reduce fear; teacher attachment to align the child with another adult to provide safety and certainty; and closeness with a parent/ carer (especially prior to saying goodbye) to create a sense of closeness for the child to hold onto while they are away and for them to work through any issues they may have while at home. Many ideas in this document are my own, have been adapted after trying others ideas, and are referenced when the original idea rests with another person.  These other persons, Aletha Solter, Marion Rose, Patty Wipfler, Gordon Neufeld and Gay Wales inspired this article. And I credit this article to them. Thank you to all my girlfriends and husband Gavin who edited my articles.  My mother Vivien, Ruth, Jen, Georgie, Lisa, Silvana, Emily. Thank you to Darcy, my daughter, for giving me the need to use these tools so I can provide them to others. And for her patience while I learn.

In service,

Emma ROGERS DUMAS