

Love, Longing, *L'inserimento*: Waving "Good-Bye"

from a parent's perspective

by Roslyn Duffy

– Situation –

*"Mommy, don't go!
Please don't go.
I want to be with you."*

*"I don't want to go to school!
I hate school!"*

*"Don't leave me, Daddy.
I need a-noth-er
h-u-u-g-g . . . "
(Hiccup. Sob.)*

– Solution –

Not So Sweet

How does a parent ever get out the door with pleas like these echoing in her head? Shakespeare might refer to parting as 'sweet sorrow' but few parents find saying "good-bye" to a tearful child 'sweet.'

Parting is sad and hard.

Love, Longing, and *L'inserimento*

Waving 'good-bye' is one aspect of a larger process, the three parts of which are: 'love,' 'longing,' and '*L'inserimento*.' 'Love' refers to "attachment," that unique connection between a child and his parents. 'Longing' is about "separation," in this case, the pain felt by a parent and child who must be parted.

"L'inserimento" is an Italian word, a rough English translation of which is: insertion, as a key being inserted into a lock. Another variation in meaning is of being "integrated." Both of these meanings contribute to a larger emotional concept, that of being "connected through relationships," referring to the caregiving environment and the people in it.

Finding the Key

Most of the thinking about a child's transition into a new program revolves around "separation," but "separation" represents only one third (the "longing" part) of the equation. All that takes place before that moment of "separation" has been the development of a child's "attachment" (love) to his family members. What supports successful separation on that first day and beyond, are the new sets of "relationships" that connect the child and his family to a program (*L'inserimento*).

What problems do you experience?

Send a description, a short word "snapshot" of the situation. Each issue, we will address your real-life issues. To assure confidentiality, names of those submitting problems will not appear.

Elements of several problems may be combined for this column. Only situations appearing in the column receive responses.

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Roslyn Duffy is the co-author with Elizabeth Crary of *The Parent's Report Card* (Parenting Press) and co-author with Jane Nelsen and Cheryl Erwin of *Positive Discipline for Preschoolers* and *Positive Discipline: The First Three Years* (Prima Press). Roslyn, a 17-year veteran director of a child care program in Seattle, Washington, lectures and teaches classes for both parents and teachers, and is a counselor in private practice. She has four children and three grandchildren. Visit www.RoslynDuffy.com.



The other side of any "good-bye" is — "hello."

Emotional Development

Throughout the first years of a child's life she is establishing her emotional framework. *Trust* and *autonomy* are vital to this. *Trust* is learned when a small baby has her needs met. She is fed, changed, held, and comforted.

Autonomy begins in the second year of life when 'me do it' becomes her goal. Both of these emotional states are affected when a child is left in the care of others.

Both the child and parent need to *trust* the caregiver(s) while the child needs to experience *separation* in a manner that fosters *autonomy* without feeling like abandonment. *L'inserimento* does that.

Dual Connection

A child placed in the care of people with whom he has no previous relationship, won't feel that special sense of *l'inserimento* without something developing it. Parents and children need to feel they *fit in* and can connect to the new program. Those connections are not only with individuals, but with the program as a whole and within the social context of the group setting.

Throughout the steps that have led to a family's enrollment, families and children have begun to make these connections. A center's philosophy, its physical layout, and the expectations the new family has of the program and the program has of the child and her family are communicated. These early orientation steps begin the *l'inserimento* process.

Attachment and Familiarity

A child's early *attachments* are visible through familiar objects. *Blankies, teddy bears, or pacifiers* are typical examples.

These represent *the familiar* — and can provide comfort when parents are not present to provide it. Such precious items need to be labeled and ideally are duplicates: one for home and one for school.

A private place *of her very own* (a cubby or any labeled container) where such items can be kept, will provide a tangible connection between home and school.

Early Connections

People in relationships share time, show interest in, and respect one another.

How can a center build relationships with new parents and children? Some programs do home visits before a child begins attendance (sharing time).

Providing a child's *Introductory Booklet* from the center, to be read at home, creates an immediate interaction (showing interest). Other versions might include a "welcome letter or card" for the child and his parent(s) or separate ones for each. Photographs of a child's future teacher, a brochure with pictures of the center, or directions to web sites with these images can help, too.

A wonderful book, *The Kissing Hand* by Audrey Penn (Washington, DC: Child & Family Press, 1993) uses kisses planted on one another's palms as a way for a parent and child to stay connected. By pressing one's palm to a cheek, each can feel the other's love — even when they are apart. This is an excellent book to recommend to incoming families (respecting feelings).

Parent-Child Visits

In Italy where *l'inserimento* outweighs other priorities, a parent often attends a program with her child for the first weeks. Over that time, the parent takes

less and less of an active part as the child integrates (*l'inserimento*) into the program. As the NAEYC publication, *Separation*, edited by Kathe Jarvis characterizes it: *be boring*.

In America, typical orientations include a parent and child visiting **before** the first day of attendance, preferably for an hour or more. All such early connections ease the transitions ahead.

Separation and Connection

Courage is the power to let go of the familiar.

Mary Bryant, *The Women's Book of Positive Quotations*, 2002

Leaving a child in child care is about separation and feelings of sadness. We all long for closeness with our loved ones. Longing, no matter how much time is spent in relationship building, means that good-byes are still hard.

Leaving one's child in the care of another takes great courage. Children everywhere cry and so do their parents, underscoring the importance of those new 'hellos.'

Time to Leave

When it is time to leave, tell your child before you go. Give hugs and reassure him that "mommy will be back" that afternoon or evening. Let a teacher know you are leaving so she can stay with your child while he waves his "good-byes."

Support through transition times is vital.

The Waving Window

A *waving window* eases the good-bye process. A waving window is a place from which a child can see and wave to his parent(s) and mom or dad can wave back. Sometimes parents will use sign

language to say “I love you” or give a special wink or signal to send a final message of comfort and care.

A caregiver accompanies each child to the waving window, to comfort and hold him.

Routines reassure

Routines reassure. Keeping things the same, day after day, helps a child to develop *trust*. Make leave-taking routines predictable.

*If daily things stay the same —
then the bigger ones,
such as mom or dad's return,
can be counted on, too.*

Call back

Parents need reassurance as well. If a child is in tears, call back an hour or so after leaving. Whether your child has calmed down or not, hearing that he is being tended to will help you breathe easier.

If all of these things are done — everyone should begin to relax and adjust within two or three weeks. Tears will stop or last only a minute or two before a child will be ready to move ahead and enjoy her day.

Delay

Sometimes this pattern gets reversed. At first everything is new and exciting and, *Oh joy, let me at it!*; but some time around weeks three through six, there is a shift. A child no longer wants to come to school or she begins crying when mom or dad leaves. The novelty has disappeared. She wants to go back home.

Child care is no longer a great adventure. Her tears are saying ‘*Stop! I want things to be like they used to be.*’ Sadness replaces enthusiasm.

As before, support, comfort, and reassurance will get parents and children through this tough time. Work on strengthening “relationships.” Play dates with new classmates, listening to music played at the child care, or singing a center’s songs at home can help. Each of these will better connect a child’s home life to her school life.

The bottom-line is that separating is hard and sad — even if that sadness gets delayed.

Close the loop

Reuniting at day’s end closes the *love, longing, and l’inserimento* loop.

“See, here I am. I came back for you, just as I said I would.”

This is an important part of helping a child to develop *trust*. He needs help to recognize the connection that: *Mommy goes away. She comes back.*

For very young children, the ability to make this connection doesn’t exist. The reappearance of someone or something relates to *object permanence*, the understanding that the missing person or object can still exist, even when out of sight. Young children lack this intellectual skill.

Object permanence

Remember a child covering her face to play *hide and seek*. If she couldn’t see you — you couldn’t see her. Such thinking lies at the heart of *object permanence*. Children really cannot understand that someone they cannot see can still see them or will come back to them, because their brains are not yet wired to make sense of this concept.

Even though a child may not have the

ability to understand object permanence, repetition and pointing out that mom or dad keep returning will strengthen its development.

Problems

If sadness, anger, or other problems continue past the first few weeks of attendance, something else may be going on. Divorce, illness, or a recent move may make a child too emotionally raw and needy to adjust to additional changes. Schedule a conference to share and explore what else may be going on. Being aware of a child’s extra neediness during a difficult time makes all the difference.

*Though saying “good-bye”
is hard —
behind each “good-bye”
is a doorway that opens to
wonderful new “hellos”!*

Welcome Letter

by Roslyn Ann Duffy

Everyone at _____ is feeling excited!

Why do you suppose we are so excited?

We are waiting to meet _____.

That's right — YOU!

You will be coming here very soon and we are waiting for you to get here!

We have a special container ready, with your name on it — a place for you to put your things.

When you are here with us, we can read stories together.

Perhaps you could bring your favorite story _____, for us to read, too.

We have lots of yummy things to eat here.

Some of the things you like to eat are _____.

(Your teachers' names are) (teacher's name is) _____.

(They are) (She or He is) happy you will be coming here.

You like playing with _____.

We have lots of fun things to play with here, too.

We can sing together. Maybe we can sing _____, a song we hear you like.

It won't be too much longer before you will be here.

We are excited to welcome you to _____.

We'll be waiting for you.

See you soon!