

Sorry to leave you

Ask most parents how they feel when they leave their cherished baby in care for the first time and the word “guilty” may creep into the conversation.

It's natural for parents to worry that their child feels unhappy or abandoned, and it's a short step to feeling guilty. Some parents have been known to sit in their car crying after drop-off, especially if they have left a crying child.

But if the care environment is a secure and loving one, it's highly likely the child will settle quickly and, if the parent calls the centre 10 minutes after drop-off, the crying child is probably full of smiles again and engrossed in a new activity.

To help you conquer an “attack of the guilts”, here's a 12-point survival plan for coping with letting others care for your little one when necessary.

IT'S vital to feel positive about the care environment, so trust your emotional reactions to staff, carers and the physical environment

WHEN you drop off your child leave them with a staff member they know.

LET your child take some special possessions that will comfort them, but make sure they are labelled.

IN THE early days of you both adapting, ring after drop-off to check that your child has settled.

REMINDE yourself that good child care has many benefits, such as making friends and enjoying new songs and activities.

IF YOU feel guilty about using child care, talk to your partner about it.

WHEN you pick up your child, try to get a sense of their day from the carer - what's been fun for them, what's been difficult.

IF YOU are finding it tough to leave your child, call your partner for support after the drop off and discuss how you are feeling.

PLAN with your partner about how you will manage a sick child who can't attend care.

SPEND time talking to your child after their day in care, and listen.

ADVOCATE for your child's needs and provide the carers with knowledge that will help your child feel safe and happy, such as wanting to go to the toilet privately. But be tactful so you don't alienate the carer.

ACKNOWLEDGE the grief and sadness that you may feel about missing out on time with your child or not witnessing developmental milestones. Talk to your partner, friends or someone who understands.

Remember, a happy child is generally the product of a happy parent, so try to embrace a life/work balance you feel comfortable with.

Survival tips

- **In the early days of using child care, ring the centre a few minutes after drop off if you are anxious about how your child is settling**
- **Remember, your child will enjoy many social benefits in child care**
- **If you are feeling guilty about leaving your child in care talk to others who have been through it.**

