



Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Parenting the  
Preschooler



# Transitions and Security Blankets

## Tips for Parents

- Transitional objects or security blankets help children to separate from parents and caregivers.
- It is common for children to be attached to a security object. Children often become distressed if you remove it for washing or if it gets lost.
- Security objects can help children learn to sleep independently. It's a reminder that you are nearby when they are going to sleep or if they wake in the night.
- By establishing routines, parents and caregivers can help young children make smoother transitions. If children know what to expect, it may be easier to switch gears.
- Restructuring your day to minimize the number of transitions makes them more manageable for the child.
- To help ease transitions, always tell your child that you are leaving, and that you will be back. "Sneaking away" can be scary for your child and erodes their trust in you.
- Avoid giving young children a time frame. Most do not understand the concept of time. Instead of saying, "I'll see you in two hours." Try, "I will see you after nap time."
- To prepare your child for a transition, let them know what, when, and where the transitions will happen by saying something like, "We will read one more story and then it is time to get ready for bed."
- To help ease a child's reaction to the transition, acknowledge and validate their feelings, "I understand that it is hard for you to leave Grandma's house; it's okay to feel sad about it. Let's find Grandma to give her a hug good-bye."
- Develop a ritual when it is time to transition. An example of this would be having your child say goodbye to their favorite swing when it is time to leave the park.

*Transitions are the changes, moves, or passages from one activity to another, or from one place to another. Transitional objects such as a security blanket, teddy bear or favorite toy can provide a child comfort during times of uncertainty.*



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Most children have difficulty with transitions at some point during childhood. Security objects help children feel secure and give them a sense of control over situations where they have little or no control.

Children vary greatly in their ability to handle transitions and their need for security objects. Experts suggest that parents and caregivers allow the child to give up a security object in their own time. Taking away the child's security object could result in attachment insecurities later in life. Try not to praise the child's independence or remove the security object from their possessions. It is important for a child to have their security object around when they need it and to say good-bye to it when they are ready to let it go.

Parents and caregivers can help a child deal with a lost security object by showing them that you understand their loss. Start by telling the child that you feel bad about it too, and that it is a sad thing to lose something so important. Gently ask the child if they have any ideas of what they might like to have in place of their lost security object.