

AT THE END OF A VISIT:
Making 'Goodbye' a Little Easier

Saying goodbye at the end of a visit is difficult for your child and you. Children of all ages will be confused about your visit ending and why you are not going home together. If they look sad, you may feel like crying--it's as if they are being taken away from you again.

How you help them say goodbye can make a big difference.

- You can make them feel loved.
- You can reassure them by showing you are happy you will be seeing them soon.
- You can give them reminders of you together that will support your attachment.

To make sure the goodbye at the end of the visit helps them the most, stand in their shoes.

At their age, what will they understand best?

Some Suggestions are:

- For children under 2 who do not use many words, it is hardest to figure out what will make them look forward to the next visit. When they aren't with you, they aren't old enough to be able to remember a lot from week to week. **Giving them a stuffed animal to bring back and forth to visits can be a help.**
- **Keeping the same routine of saying hello and goodbye can fix you in their mind.**
- Most 2-5 year olds do not know the difference between tomorrow and next week, **so your emphasis should be on one thing you will do together at the next visit, not when.** Although they may not have an easy time talking on the phone, **giving them a picture of you together can be reassuring.** The older they are, the easier it will be for them to use the idea of talking to your picture in between visits.
- At this age, **something you repeat at every goodbye can be a help**, such as singing the same song or coming up with your own goodbye ritual like an enthusiastic cheerleader ("Who does Mommy love? Naya and CeeCee! Who

can't Mommy wait to see next week? Naya and CeeCee! Who's going eat popcorn with Mommy next week? Naya and CeeCee!" etc.)

- **School age children** will be able to look forward to a visit on a specific day and to talk to you on the telephone.
- The older they get, the more possible it is for them to be in charge of **bringing something to the visit, such as an art project they want to show you. Making a scrapbook** of old photographs or pictures they draw, with stories they tell about what they remember in the past can be something they will look forward to in visits.
- **Drawing each other a picture during the visit** for you each to take with you or bringing a loving note to give them when they leave can help say goodbye.
- Probably the **best goodbye advice is to do more listening and less talking**. Your children cannot understand your complex feelings or plans for the future. You will be full of feelings as the visit ends, but those are for you to talk to another adult about. Listen to your children. Agree with them that it is hard to say goodbye. Label their feelings with words such as, "We both feel sad to say goodbye. We both feel happy we will see each other soon."

While saying goodbye at the end of visits can be painful for you and your child(ren), trying some of the suggestions above and creating a routine can be very helpful. You can come up with your own ideas for what this can be and together, with your child(ren), create a goodbye ritual that will help make this hard time a little easier.