

## **GUIDELINES FOR THE SEPARATION PROCESS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN AT FAMILY NETWORK**

Dear Parents,

It is normal for children to differ quite a bit in how they react to separating from their parents/caregivers, and in how quickly they feel comfortable with new people and in new places. It is also normal for young children to fluctuate between periods of greater independence and greater clinginess. The amount of ease or difficulty in separating is not a measure of how good a parent you are, or how “good” your child is! The following steps are intended as guidelines only – do as much or as little of this as is appropriate for YOUR child.

### **1. What is your goal?**

What are your own feelings and wishes about separating from your child at Family Network? Do you want to stay with your child, or do you want to leave the room? If you want to stay, please feel free to do so. If you want to work towards leaving the room and there is no reason in terms of your child not to, please read on...

### **2. Building a sense of safety and security for your child in the children’s room**

You can help your child feel safe and secure in the room and with the staff by:

- Talking about Family Network before coming. Mention staff members, favorite toys or activities, and friends. If you have pictures of your child at the center, look at these at home with your child.
- Helping your child to notice and connect with staff members when you arrive, e.g. “Let’s say ‘hi’ to \_\_\_\_\_”.
- Gradually sitting back and letting the staff take over, unless it is a day when the room is very busy. This will help your child to come to understand that s/he will be taken care of by the staff, and that this is OK with you.
- Encouraging your child to ask the staff members for what s/he needs, or demonstrating this by saying, for example, “Let’s go ask \_\_\_\_\_”.
- Don’t totally ignore your child in this process, of course – this would be unnatural and confusing to your child. Always allow your child to come to you to “touch base” as needed when you are in the room. Respond to your child and then sit back again. If necessary, help him/her get re-involved with a staff member or activity.

### **3. Timing**

For a child who has difficulty with separation, it is usually best to start the process during a period of relative calm, i.e. not when there’s a new baby, a family move, or following any type of trauma such as an illness or injury. Think about how your child behaves when separated from you in other situations or settings; how is this similar or different from how it goes at Family Network? What has been successful, or not?

Also, it can be helpful to look for times when there are fewer children in the room, so that the teachers can be more available to support your child. Notice when and where your child seems the most comfortable and involved – in the gym? During free play time? During snack time? Shortly after you arrive? After 20 minutes?

#### **4. Making a plan**

Make a realistic plan that you feel you can follow through on and that seems appropriate for your child. If you think your child will cry and that you will want to come back quickly, only plan to leave the room for a couple of minutes in the beginning. Check with the staff to be sure the plan seems workable; if your child has difficulty separating, be sure the staff knows what is happening.

#### **5. Doing it**

- Explain to your child what is happening. If this is a change in your routine with your child at Family Network, you may want to prepare him/her ahead of time. Keep the explanation brief, matter of fact, and positive.  
For a brief separation you might say, “I’ll watch you play for a few minutes, and then I’ll go get a cup of coffee for 5 minutes while you’re here playing with \_\_\_\_\_, and then I’ll be back.”  
For a longer period, you might say “I’ll watch you play for a few minutes, and then I’ll go to the Parent Room. You’ll play here, and have a snack, and then I’ll come back at gym time.”  
Try not to end your explanation with “and then I’ll go out”; rather, end with “...and then I’ll be back”.
- Try not to convey hesitation – your child will pick up on it and have a harder time. Don’t give your child mixed messages by telling your child that you are leaving but then waiting for him/her to indicate that it’s OK!
- ALWAYS tell your child when you are actually leaving and that you will be back – THEN GO! Never “sneak out”, as this can make your child more insecure and increase his/her attention to your presence or absence. Staff members will always call for you if your child cannot be comforted within a few minutes.

**6. Remember that this is a process** of building trust between your child, the teacher, and yourself – it may take time, but it will be worth it when you and your child can enjoy yourselves separately as well as together at Family Network and in many other situations! We want to be responsive to you and to make this process as comfortable as possible for you and your child. Please feel free to discuss any questions or concerns you may have with the teachers, with Family Network Social Worker Geri Greenberg, or with Program Coordinator Terry Beem.

#### **Note:**

**These guidelines apply to children in the Rainbow and Sunshine Rooms. Parents must stay with their infants in the Baby & Me Room.**