



Ask BYFS

May 2007

Question: We all have done research about how to pick the 'right' child care provider or babysitter for our child and had experience doing just that. How do you know when something is not right or is not working for your child?

Recently a parent relayed a story about a child care transition for her daughter that had happened due to a move. Her daughter was not happy going to her new 'school' and cried daily when being dropped off. The parent initially attributed the child's behavior to the transition and encouraged the child to give it time. As this behavior was not typical of her child and continued for a week, the parent hung around one day after dropping her off and waited silently outside, out of sight, to see if her child calmed down. When she heard one of the child care workers yell at her child, label her negatively, and blame the mother for her behavior, the parent knew her daughter had been right all along about the provider. She retrieved her daughter immediately and began looking for another option.

We are all in situations where our children complain to us about anything and everything. When they complain about a teacher or a program or a babysitter or child care provider, we have to separate the real from the imagined. We know sometimes our child might complain because it is a new person or new situation and they are expressing loyalty for a past teacher or experience. We know they might be feeling some separation anxiety about leaving us for any number of reasons - a recent move, death in the family, loss of a friend or pet. They might be responding to a challenge or task that might be new or feels insurmountable to them at the time and might be looking for a parent to rescue them. Often our child cannot name the issue the way an adult might be able to and just whines, resists, or says they "do not want to." It is the parent's job to be the translator and problem solver, to figure out what the issues are for their child and ensure a positive learning experience.

While there is no prescribed solution to these varied issues, there are steps a parent can take to help figure this out:

First, problem solve with your child. Ask questions about what is going on and try to figure out what the real issue is. *Do you like the teacher? What does the teacher do to make you comfortable/uncomfortable? What do you do with the other kids? What happens if kids fight?*

Second, try to sort out your child's emotions. Find out if your son or daughter is nervous, scared, shy, unsure of themselves, worried about something. Ask things like *What feels funny about going to school or being with the babysitter? What do you worry about happening if you stay with this school or teacher? Are you afraid that I/we will be disappointed in you for anything if you stay? If you go?*

Third, problem solve with the school or teacher or other provider. Be clear about the behaviors your child is exhibiting and that this is not usual. Assume that they want the best for your child as well and want to partner with you to sort this out. Strategize about how to increase your child's comfort, what you could do and what they might do. If they are reluctant or unable to do that or indicate that this is just your or your child's issue, then it is likely not the best partnership for care of your child.

The bottom line here is the safety of your child, both physical and emotional. Your child deserves a situation that ensures their safety on every level. As the parent you are the guardian of that. You have the obligation to help your child feel that in every situation. And you have the right to expect that anyone else providing care of your son or daughter takes that responsibility seriously as well.

The BYFS is here to support and nurture the social, emotional, and developmental needs of children, adults, and families in Bedford. Email your questions to sueb@town.bedford.ma.us and the Bedford Youth and Family Services team (BYFS) will choose one to answer next month. Your name and email will remain confidential. Be sure to visit the BYFS website at <http://www.town.bedford.ma.us/youth/youthindex.html>.
