

Leaving Home



“ *If ever this is tomorrow when we are not together...
there is something you must always remember.*

*You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem,
and smarter than you think.*

*But the most important thing is, even if we're apart...
I'll always be with you.* ”

~A.A. Milne

They are leaving home.

“ *With each drop off
and pick up at school,
your child will be
building the capacity
to hold his or her
world and be held by
yours...* ”

The move feels so big. Sometimes it's bigger for you. And sometimes it's bigger for them. Pre-school, Camp, College. Doesn't matter. It feels huge, transformational. But even though it feels like it's one big move, that's actually not the way it happens. Leaving home is really done over years in the smallest of steps. Mundane steps that you don't see as the runway to independence. It is a runway that was built brick by brick – with every goodbye and every goodnight. You and your child have been building the muscles for departure with every hello and goodbye; we are apart AND we are connected.

With each drop off and pick up at school, your child will be building the capacity to hold his or her world and be held by yours—building the muscles to hold all of that in your child's heart. You forget that in addition to the many things your child is learning at school, they are also learning attachment.

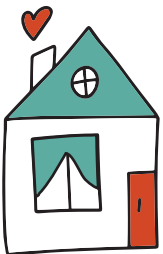
Attachment is one of the most important things we learn—and, unless there is a problem, one of the most invisible things we learn. Attachment is learned in the everyday back and forth of life. We teach it with peek-a-boo when they are babies and hide and seek when they are older. We teach it with every good night and good morning. We teach it with every mistake and every repair. It is hard to see because it changes shape all of the time. As a parent, attachment means being ballast—leaning to the side of the boat that needs to be brought to balance. Sometimes it looks like holding and soothing and picking them up in your arms, wiping away tears. And sometimes it means holding the line, having the hard conversation, making them stretch.

But at each milestone of stepping out and away, your child will walk on their new legs of attachment and feel them for the first time, again. They will wonder, “Can I do this? Can you? Will you remember me: Will everything be okay when I return? If I forget you, will you still be there? Who am I without you?” They will feel joy and pride in their new steps away, and fear and sadness at the loss of the more secure time they felt before. It is both. And holding both is really hard to learn. It takes most adults until mid-life to really have the ability to hold two truths in their arms at the same time and most kids can’t. They swing wildly between the poles—one day all excited and proud about the new adventure and the new friends, and the next day full of despair at the prospect of leaving.

“We think that leaving home and the big milestones of our lives are about independence—but they are really about CONNECTION.”

And here’s the paradox for parents. We think that leaving home and the big milestones of our lives are about independence—but they are really about CONNECTION. Whether they are two, ten or twenty, your job is the same. You are already good at it. It is simple but not easy. You keep up your job as ballast. You help them hold both by holding the other: the other truth (yes, I will remember you), the other emotions (I know it’s hard, but you are learning so much), and the other end of the rope (I’ve got you, and you’ve got this, we are doing great, even if it doesn’t feel like it).

So, as you send them off to school and to their new lives. Remember this. They are learning so many new things, but they are also, most importantly, learning attachment. They are learning how relationships hold over space and time. They are learning that love and care and trust can stretch far and wide. They are learning that they exist, even when you can’t see them, and that you can hold them in your mind and heart—and they can do the same. They are learning that they carry all of the love and knowledge and resourcefulness of home in their own legs—that they can stand on their own feet and feel the sturdiness of them.



And they are learning that home is woven through every cell of their bodies.

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