

Adjusting to day care under the Berlin adjustment model
("Berliner Eingewöhnungsmodell")

Only one caregiver is responsible for the child during the whole adjustment phase. She is the primary caregiver and has special responsibility for the child. She will document the child's development and conduct parent-caregiver meetings until the child leaves the day care centre.

3-day-initiation phase

A parent/close attachment figure visits the day care centre together with the child (always at the same time of the day if possible), spends approx. 1 hour in the group room together with the child and then takes the child home again.

The caregiver cautiously approaches the child **without putting any pressure on it**, either by offering it to play or by taking part in the child's play. She observes the parent-child interaction.

In this situation it is important that the close attachment figure

- acts in a rather passive way,
- in no way pushes the child to move away from him/her,
- always accepts that the child wants to be close, and
- pays attention to the child while staying in the background and is always there for the child.

In these first three days, NO separation is attempted.

4th day – First attempt at separation

(If the fourth day is a Monday, the first attempt at separation will be on the fifth day.)

A few minutes after their arrival in the group room, the close attachment figure *emphatically* says good-bye to the child and leaves the room; however, he/she stays nearby and returns no later than 30 minutes later.

It is the caregiver's task to support the child during this separation, e.g. by

- saying good-bye together,
- explaining that the parent/attachment figure will return,
- accepting the pain of separation,
- comforting the child,
- directing the child's attention to play.

Should the child fail to notice or pay attention to the departure of the attachment figure, the caregiver should draw the child's attention to it.

The child's REACTIONS determine whether this attempt at separation is continued or suspended:

- (1) If the child continues to be composed and to show an interest in its environment, the separation is extended to up to 30 minutes. During this time, it is the caregiver's task to observe the child's behaviour and reactions and to maintain the contact by taking part in its play.
- (2) This also applies if the child starts to cry but the caregiver can comfort it quickly and durably.

If the child reacts in the above described manner, the stabilisation phase can start right on the following day.

- (3) Should the child show signs of distress when the parent leaves (stiffening of body), start to cry inconsolably, and strongly demand his/her return during the attempted separation, he/she must be called back immediately.

If the child behaves as describes under point (3), a second attempt at separation is necessary.

Several days must pass before the second attempt at separation may take place.

Second attempt at separation

If the child acted inconsolably on the fourth day, the attachment figure should on the fourth and fifth day take part in group life just like before and, depending on the child's disposition but no earlier than on the seventh day, start a new attempt at separation.

During this new attempt at separation, the caregiver must again follow the above described procedure.

Should this second attempt at separation be successful, the stabilisation phase can start on the following day.

Stabilisation phase

If the child is composed or can be comforted by the caregiver during the first attempt at separation on the fourth day, the duration of separation will be extended on the fifth day. If a second attempt at separation is necessary, the beginning of the stabilisation phase is postponed to day 8.

At the beginning of the stabilisation phase, the child should ideally attend the day care centre no more than half-days; towards the end, full-day care is possible.

On the fifth and sixth day (second attempt at separation: eighth/ninth day) the presence of the attachment figure in the day care centre continues to be necessary – but no longer right with the child – so that he/she can be fetched whenever needed.

During the stabilisation phase the contact established between child and caregiver must be intensified so that the child grows attached to the caregiver. From the fourth day, the caregiver tries to take full care of the child.

Depending on the child's age and development, the stabilisation phase continues until the child's tenth or twentieth day in the day care centre.

Final phase

Adjustment is completed once the child has accepted the caretaker as a “safe base” and accepts comfort from her. E.g., this is the case if the child protests against the close attachment figure's departure (shows attachment behaviour), but quickly accepts comfort from the caregiver and plays cheerfully.

In this phase, the close attachment figure will no longer be present in the day care centre but is always available should the newly formed relationship with the caregiver not yet be sufficient to stabilise the child in special circumstances.