

School Procedure for supporting children to separate from parents



We have a duty of care to safeguard and promote the welfare of every child in accordance with the Children Act 1989 and 2004, the statutory *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (KCSIE) guidance, and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework. These frameworks require schools to ensure that children's emotional well-being is supported and that transitions are managed safely and sensitively. When a child is experiencing distress during separation from a parent or carer, schools may need to guide the child into the building to help them settle in a calm and reassuring manner. This practice is not only a compassionate response but a safeguarding and educational requirement.

Separation anxiety is a common developmental stage, particularly in early childhood, and can cause a child to become overwhelmed at the point of handover. Staff may therefore use gentle, low-level physical guidance—such as offering a hand or lightly directing the child's movement—to ensure the child reaches a safe, supervised environment. Any physical contact must be minimal, respectful and proportionate, consistent with the principles in the Use of Reasonable Force (DfE) guidance, which recognises that staff may use appropriate physical contact to offer comfort or guide a child where this is in their best interests and not disciplinary in nature. Such contact is considered “permissible positive handling,” aimed exclusively at supporting the child's emotional regulation and safety.

There may be times when an adult will physically support a child to allow a parent to leave without the child running after them. This would only be carried out if agreed at the time by the parent or if deemed a safety measure. If this level of physical intervention was needed with frequency, then a Positive Handling Plan would be created in collaboration with the parent.

Guiding a child inside also reduces the risk of the situation escalating. Prolonged distress in open or busy entrance areas can make the child feel more anxious, impact the well-being of other children, and create an unsafe environment if a child attempts to run away or becomes physically dysregulated. By calmly and promptly supporting the child into school, staff can help them access familiar routines, trusted adults and soothing activities that promote emotional recovery. This approach aligns with the EYFS emphasis on secure attachments, nurturing relationships and responsive caregiving.

Schools are also required to work collaboratively with parents under the **Education Act 1996** duty to secure regular attendance. Establishing a consistent and predictable morning routine—where staff know when to intervene and parents know when to hand over—supports attendance, eases transitions and prevents distress from becoming entrenched.

Any guidance into school would be recorded if it forms part of a repeated pattern, and parents should be kept informed. Staff must follow the school's behaviour, safeguarding and positive handling policies, ensuring that any physical contact is transparent, necessary, and delivered with the child's dignity and emotional needs at the centre.

In summary, gently guiding a child into school during an emotional separation is a legally and professionally supported practice. It reflects schools' safeguarding duties, attachment-informed care, and the requirement to create a safe, calm environment in which all children can settle and learn.