Bittersweet transitions- surviving the first day of school from daycare to college

It’s that time of year again, supply #3 on my back-to-school shopping list, glue sticks, are sold out at the Target down the street. At this time of year, I see many of my patients embarking on their next stage of schooling. Kids I remember starting kindergarten are off to high school. Babies are starting daycare and the teens are starting college. With all of these transitions to independence, the basic rules of daycare drop off still hold:

- Always convey to your child that the transition is a positive experience. You give your child cues on how to act in any situation. Better to convey optimism than anxiety.
- Take your child and place her into the arms of a loving adult- do not leave her alone in the middle of a room.
- Do not linger. Prolonging any tears, only prolongs tears. The faster you leave, the faster happiness will start.
- It’s ok to go back and spy on them to reassure yourself that they have stopped crying- just don’t let them see you.

Now with that all being said, kick back late at night, after all the school forms have been put away. Whether your child is off to college, off to daycare or off to kindergarten, take out a glass of wine and listen to the letter I wrote for one of my own children years ago…

My Child,

As we sit, the night before kindergarten, your toes peeking out from under the comforter, I notice that your toes are not so little anymore.

Tomorrow those toes will step up onto to the bus and carry you away from me. Another step towards independence. Another step to a place where I can protect you less. But I do notice that those toes have feet and legs which are getting stronger. You're not as wobbly as you used to be. Each time you take a step you seem to go farther and farther.

I trust that you will remember what I've taught you. Look both ways before you cross the street, chose friends who are nice to you, and whatever happens don't eat yellow snow. I also trust that there are other eyes and hearts who will watch and guide you.

But that won't stop me from worrying about each step you take.

Won't stop me from holding my breath.

Just like when you first started to walk, I'll always worry when you falter.

I smile because I know you'll hop up onto the bus tomorrow, proud as punch, laughing and disappearing in a sea of waving hands. I just hope that at some point, those independent feet will proudly walk back and stand beside me.

Maybe it will be when you first gaze into your newborn's eyes, or maybe it will be when your child climbs onto the bus.

Until then,

I hold my breath each time you take a step.

Love,
Mommy

Naline Lai, MD

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