



ENJOY YOUR FREEDOM.

It's a good thing for your child to see that you have a life and a source of joy other than her. Your going away also gives your child the opportunity to get to know her caregiver in a new way.

LET HIM REACH OUT.

Rather than call (which might remind your child how much he misses you), invite your child to call you when he wants to touch base. You might also choose to text or e-mail to keep the communication light.

LEAVE A LOVE NOTE.

Give your caregiver a note to give your child at breakfast, or record your voice reading a bedtime story. This allows your child to know you are thinking about him without taking him away from the fun activities he will be doing in your absence.

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Hanging with Auntie

Leaving your child in another's care is a learning opportunity



BY MICHELLE ANTHONY, M.A., PH.D.

Whether it's the first or the tenth time, leaving your child overnight often evokes excitement for you—we all need the occasional break, after all—but also guilt and worry (“Will she be OK without me?”). Your 7- or 8-year-old may have the same kinds of feelings.

Children this age are becoming more independent in all aspects of their lives. They're better able to keep track of their belongings and follow through on expectations. Their circle of friends has widened, and they require less supervision. Most children love this newfound freedom.

But many feel ambivalent. The world is a big place, and not all adventures work out the

way they hope. As a result, 7- and 8-year-olds commonly engage in a “push and pull” with parental attention—needing it immensely at some points and shunning it at others.

This ambivalence can make it tricky to plan an adults-only outing. But doing so allows your child a safe tryout into the world of being without you. It allows him to take on additional responsibility on a short-term basis, to experiment with coping skills, and to deepen bonds with another caregiver.

You can deal with the guilt you may feel by remembering that you are creating learning opportunities for your child. You may also want to choose a close relative as a caregiver, like an aunt, to ease your mind. Provide suggestions for activities to the caregiver, but leave the door open for her to come up with her own spur-of-the-moment plans. Share details about bedtime or other routines in writing. Finally, try to project confidence in your child's ability to manage without you and in your own ability to manage without her. **P&C**

