

Pieces of the Bye: The importance of preparing to say good bye to children and their families.

by Janice Fialka

www.danceofpartnership.com

As teachers, social workers, nurses, and other service providers, we are well aware of the importance of our first encounter with a new child, a new family, or a new client. Be it in their home, our classroom, our office, or our school, we make certain to greet families with a welcoming spirit that promotes a sense of safety and comfort. We want to communicate with our eyes, our words, and our gestures: *"We care about you and we are eager to work with you."* We value our beginning meetings with families and children and typically prepare with skill, time, and care for this first encounter. As the saying goes, we want to start out on the right foot.

Equally important, yet often overlooked, is the importance of preparing to say "good bye" to children and families as they transition to new schools or programs. Teachers and other providers often plan good bye parties, create colorful picture books of their student's accomplishments, write thoughtful notes to parents, or in some way recognize this precious moment in time. These strategies are meaningful and help to prepare for the good bye but they might unintentionally prevent us from looking at the *whole* experience or *all* of the pieces in the relationship. Partnerships with children and families are complex and can't easily be condensed into a farewell party, red balloons, or a delicious good bye pie. There are elaborate checklists for all the features of a high quality transition, but nowhere is there even a box to check for the personal dimensions of leave taking.

Endings of all kinds often stir up strong emotions—positive and negative. As we prepare to say good bye to children and families, we may be pleased that they are leaving with a new set of skills but we may also question ourselves and worry if we did everything we could to prepare them for the next phase of their education or life. These worries or wonderings may linger, even as we hug the children good bye or warmly shake the hands of the parents.

Saying good bye gives rise to the joys and worries, wishes and regrets that typically emerge in relationships. If we try to disregard the range of feelings and thoughts, we may lose the opportunity to be reflective and integrate the lessons learned from this relationship. In addition, we may end up carrying these worries or wonderings with us for longer than what is helpful or necessary.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT GOOD BYES THAT CHALLENGE US?

- Endings often remind us of previous "good byes" we have experienced personally and professionally. They stir up the old. Sometimes it's hard to distinguish between old feelings and the current experience.

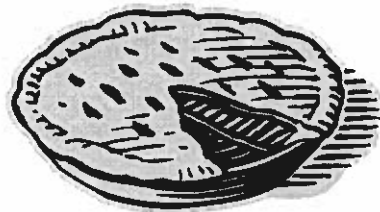
- Endings remind us of our vulnerability and the fact that there are no guarantees in life. Nothing *really is* forever. Change is inevitable.
- Endings interrupt our routines and take us away from what is familiar.
- Endings force us to enter new worlds, with new people, norms, and experiences.
- Endings may give rise to awkward feelings, such as sadness, frustration, or even a feeling of relief that this relationship is (finally!) over. Endings may stir up other feelings such as anger or regret about what we didn't accomplish, or what remains unresolved or undiscussed. We may anticipate strong feelings of missing this child, family, or client.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR SAYING GOOD BYE

In preparing for the numerous good byes that children, parents, and service providers experience, I created a tool that provides some structure to helping people reflect in a deeper and more comprehensive way about “saying good bye.” This tool acknowledges that there are multiple and varied reactions that rise in all relationships. It is *not* essential that we discuss each and every reaction, thought, or feeling however by using this tool we allow ourselves to recognize the range of experiences—to think about the many piece of the “bye.” Think of this as a new take on the transition checklist—the questions we never ask. Maybe we can think of the pie as “food for thought” on the subject!

Pieces of the “Bye”
form.)

(Please see the attached



Our “bye” is divided into eight wedges, each representing a different aspect of the relationship. There is space in each piece of the pie to jot down a few words or phrases that get triggered by the open ended statements placed on each slice. They are:

In this relationship with you and/or your child,

- *I feel thankful for . . .*
- *I have some regrets/wishes about. . .*
- *I want to celebrate this accomplishment(s) . . .*
- *I learned this about me/about you . . .*
- *I will miss . . .*
- *The next steps or resources available to you/me during the transition . . .*
- *This good bye reminds me of . . .*

- Open ended (This space is available for any thought/feeling that might surface.)

This visual tool invites us to think about many facets of our work with families, especially the more challenging ones. In using this guide, we don't have to dutifully complete each "piece" for each relationship. We use it to help us uncover reactions, to be reflective and thus be more deliberate in our discussions.

WAYS TO USE "PIECES OF THE BYE"

- Use the tool in your private reflection as you prepare to say good bye to a family or someone you have worked with.
- Offer this tool to your families or clients and encourage them to think about these feelings and thoughts that might arise during the transition.
- Share your responses with each other, allowing enough time to sort through the feelings and thoughts.
- Use this tool to think about other professional and personal good byes, such as a staff member who is leaving, your own good bye with your child who is moving out of the home, a friend who is leaving the community, etc.
- Use the tool as a way to end workshops or meetings. Individuals can offer one of the "pieces" of the bye in a round robin fashion.
- Begin the preparation early. Don't wait until the good bye party or the last day to reflect on these issues.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Good byes can be a time of celebration, a time of honoring the accomplishments. They can be times of pausing—a time to say thanks, a time for sharing gifts, hugs, and gratitude, as well as times of reflection and recognition of the range of feelings. Good byes can be a time to learn new lessons and gather insights. Good byes can be time to sit at the table, share memories, food, and perhaps, to share pieces of the pie and bye.

(The author wishes to recognize the contributions of Julie Banfield, Camille Catlett, Bonnie Dalliga, Jan Moss, Carol Spaman, participants in the *Knowing Ourselves and Connecting with Families* training series and especially Sheryl Goldberg in thinking about this topic.)

"This document was produced through an IDEA (2004) Mandated Activities Grant for Early On ® Training and Technical Assistance awarded by the Michigan Department of Education. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Michigan Department of Education, and no endorsement is inferred. This

document is in the public domain and may be copied for further distribution when proper credit is given. For further information or inquiries about this project, contact the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services, P.O. Box 30008, Lansing Michigan 48909."



Pieces of the "bye"

©Janice Fialka (www.danceofpartnership.com)

In this relationship . . .

