

## If You Get A Letter...

*Dear Mommy, I miss you. I want you to come and get me right now. I don't want to be here anymore. I'm mad--you got me up and brought me to this place. I wanted to watch "Animaniacs" instead. I want you to give me a pop tart. I want you to get me now and we can go to the zoo again. I miss the elephant and the seal. And I want cotton candy. Love, Danny*

One of the tasks of life, and of children, is learning to cope with emotions. Children are learning about how to express them in new and "safe" ways. At SYC we use lots of tools for expression. One of them is letter writing. Letters and stories may come home to you offering you insight into your child's thoughts or remembrances of her day at school. Often the letters are a safe place to express the tougher issues, thoughts and feelings she is facing:

- Missing you--that's a big one. Sometimes tinged with both sadness and anger because you're not doing what she feels is important. For example, "Come and get me now."
- Events--both good and bad. We've written many letters for children after they got hurt, and they're wishing their mommy or daddy could come to take care of them. So we write out those wishes.

**Why?** Two reasons:

*Emotional expression and release.* In writing a letter for a child, teachers offer a safe, supported moment. We write and read back only words that the child offers to us for her ideas and feelings. This provides validation and acceptance. Although the letter isn't you, writing to you gives a sense of a message sent.

*Literacy.* Children's thoughts and words are given personal value and meaning in the written form.

Remember that the letter(s) you receive reflect only the thoughts and feelings of your child at a given moment in the day. In fact, if the technique worked, after (or shortly after) writing the letter and putting it in a safe place, she moved on to other things--play.

Sometimes it's hard to receive these letters, particularly those full of anger. Here are common statements we've written many times:

- I hate this place, they're mean to me
- Don't bring me here ever again
- I'm mad at you
- I hate you! I hate...

When we read these statements we must try to realize what part of it the child was really mad about. Many times he was mad because he is at school and not with you, where he'd rather be. He is in a situation or place he'd like a way out of--"come and get me right now." The good news is he is saying what he likes and wants as much as he is saying what he doesn't like.

Many times your letter will hold a key to whether he got through the "hard" stuff. It follows a format, generally: some hard feelings, sad feelings, then moves into wishes, maybe a memory about something

different. This means your child expressed the thoughts and feelings and moved on to other ideas, and probably right into play after the letter.

**So now what?** Suggestions to the receiver:

- Read it out loud to your child
- Ask if there's anything else he wanted you to know
- Ask, "What do you want to do with this letter now?"

Chances are, he is pretty much done with the issue(s) presented in the letter. He doesn't need much response except to know that you received the message.

These letters are not only a way for us, as teachers, to hear your child. They also provide a connector from your child to you when you can't be there to hold him.

*...Jenifer Bojanowski, SYC Teacher*