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## You and Me, Babe

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BY KARA MAYER ROBINSON

The Parent Paper

When each of my kids were babies, I often wished for time for myself. But even when the round-the-clock breastfeeding and crying made me crave alone time, leaving them with a caregiver gave me an awful feeling in the pit of my stomach. It felt like part of me was missing.

But the reality was that leaving my baby with someone else was something I'd have to get used to if I was going to be a working mom. Before long I learned to accept—and even appreciate—the days I spent working while my little ones were under the care of another.

Fortunately, there are steps you can take to help feel close to your baby even when you can't be with her. I asked Kacey L. Kowalchuk, director of the Warren KinderCare Center, and Tracey Frost Rensky, CEO and co-founder of New York's Citibabes, a family-centric club that includes a preschool, indoor playground, parenting seminars, family café, adult gym and retail store, for insider tips. Here's what they suggest:



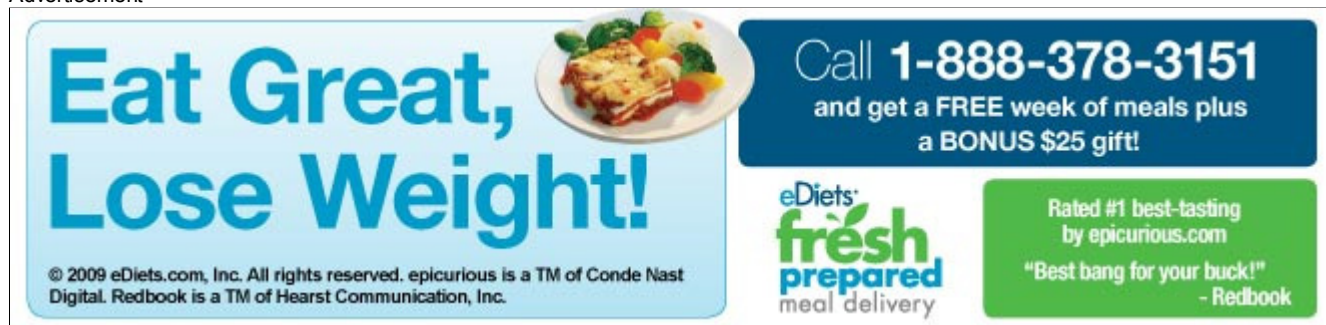
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### For baby:

- Stay on the scent. Take a shirt or other small piece of clothing you've worn (but don't wash it or the scent will disappear) and leave it with the caregiver or childcare center. "Baby can snuggle with his parent's shirt throughout the day to stay connected and smell the scent," explains Kowalchuk, who has been the director of her child-care center for 10 years. Remind your baby's caregiver to tuck it into baby's crib at naptime.
- Voice lessons. Baby can be reminded of your voice, too. Kowalchuk recommends recording your little one's favorite book onto a CD (don't forget your animated character voices!) and asking the teacher to play it during the day. "Your child will feel that much more special because it's his parent's voice narrating the story," she says.
- Photo opps. Just like you keep images of your offspring on your smartphone or in your wallet, do the same

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for her. Take a picture of yourself and leave it alongside her other personal items. (I can't help but remember that mobile that Sex and the City's working-mom Miranda made for Brady's crib. Each piece featured a mug of his mom!)

- **Step in.** Even though you won't be there every day, a quick visit here and there can help day care feel more homey. Whether you're up for helping at class parties, popping in as a guest reader or assisting with a craft, Kowalchuk says that being involved in your child's class, when your schedule allows it, is a great way to stay connected.

- **Contribute to the cubby.** Whether it's a hook or a cubby that your little one gets at the center, you can help connect it to his home life. Leave a special note or drawing in it or tape up a photo of your family dog. Presto! An instant family reminder.

- **Show and tell.** Ask if your child can bring in a personal item from home to share with the group. Maybe it's a souvenir from your family vacation or a special rock that he found on your nature walk. He'll feel happy when he sees and touches it at day care and if he's old enough to talk about it, sharing the story with other kids will help him feel safe and appreciated.

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## For you:

- **Stay in the loop.** Figuring out how to communicate with your child's caregivers is a must, says Frost Rensky. "Many preschool and day-care sites have online newsletters or photo galleries," she says, noting that this fall, her preschool will offer a password-accessible online newsletter with photos and videos from the school day. No such technology at your center? "Find out if you can simply call or e-mail the teachers from time to time to check on your child's progress and interests."

- **Capture your child.** With a photo, that is! Ask your caregiver to snap cell phone photos of your little one on a regular basis and then send them to you throughout the day, a technique that Frost Rensky swears by. What fun it can be to look up from your computer reports to see your smiley babe on the neighborhood swing.

- **Sprinkle your workplace with a bit of home.** Your child's cubby isn't the only place

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to smooth the transition between home and away. Dress up your own workspace by adding personal items that keep your babe's image close. Frost Rensky suggests using websites like Scribble Press or Cafépress to create personalized objects with your child's photo, like a coffee mug or mouse pad. Because let's face it...it's not just baby who's craving one-on-one time!

You may not be with baby 24/7, but that doesn't have to mean you lose your connection with your little one. Simply by bridging the gap between time spent with you and time with caregivers, you can both feel close, comfortable and connected.

Kara Mayer Robinson is a freelance writer who enjoys her work time but also loves coming home to the huge smile and outstretched arms of her 2-year-old as he greets her with a great big "Hiiiiii, MOM!"

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