

## A story for parent absence

*This is a story for the reassurance of a very young child when a parent or major carer needs to go away for a short while.*

*Whether it be for a one-off absence, like for occasional work, a holiday or a hospital stay, or for regular fly-in/fly-out employment away from the family, young children, (including those who do not talk yet,) may need a little extra help to adjust to the absence. They need reassurance that their mother, father or regular carer, like a grandparent, can go away and will come back. It helps when the passing time is marked by a repeating story, like this one, told each day of the absence. Ideally you would change the details to suit your child.*

*The child can also be reassured about the loved person's return by the provision of some visible marker of time passing. For example one could use a calendar with opening doors (like an Advent Calendar) where one door or window is opened on each day of absence. There can be drawings or photos revealed inside each opening door, or a little surprise, or instruction for something for the child to do that day and so on. (Pizza boxes are great for making such calendars). Or little containers can be used to put messages or little presents in each day, sometimes for the child from the person going away but also perhaps from the child for the absent one, to surprise them when they get home. For example you could use little bowls, or match boxes or boxes from a Third World gift shop. Every family can find their own way in this, according to their resources, their creativity, the time available and the length of time of absence. Even a set number of dog biscuits in a jar for the dog, one for each day, can be a marker in this way. Remember to make it sustainable, without too much stress for the stay-at-home adult. Of course healthy treats, activities and crafts can give the child something to look forward to each day and enrich your lives together too.*

*Let the child also help to prepare a welcome home for the person when the time comes: a drawing, a card, a banner, a posy of flowers, a cake, a special dinner.*

*All this creates a daily reassurance of return and an ordered sense of anticipation for a home-coming.*

## Bennie's story

Once upon a time there was a little boy called Bennie, who lived in a house amongst tall trees with his two big sisters and his Mama and his Papa. One day Mama sat down at the table with them and said she was going away for a few days to work but that she would come back to them soon because she loved them all so. Papa would look after them all while she was gone.

So the day came and Mama packed her bags and they all took her to the airport where she gave them all a big hug and off she went.

When they got home, that first day, little Bennie said: "When will my Mama come home?" His Papa said "She'll come home in four more days because she loves you so but I'm here to look after you all. We've got lots to do together. Today we have to do the washing." And they did and Bennie helped to hang all the socks on the line in a row in the sun. So—

On the first day they did the washing.

The next day Bennie woke up and said: "When will my Mama come home?" And his Papa said "She'll come home in three more days because she loves you so but I'll look after you all. We've got lots to do together. Today we are going to work in the garden and plant some seedlings to surprise Mama." And so they did and Bennie very carefully planted some blue pansies because they were Mama's favourites. So—

On the first day they did the washing.

On the second day they worked in the garden.

On the next day, Bennie woke up and said: "When will my Mama come home?" And his Papa said "She'll come home in two more days because she loves you so but I'm here to look after

you all. We've got lots to do. Today we are going out visiting." And they did. They visited their favourite neighbour whose dog had three new puppies. So—

On the first day they did the washing.

On the second day they worked in the garden.

On the third day they went out visiting.

On the next day, Bennie woke up and said: "When will my Mama come home?" And his Papa said "She'll come home in one more day because she loves you so but I'm here to look after you all. We've got lots to do. Today we've got to clean the house." And they did. Bennie picked up all the toys and swept very carefully with his little broom. So—

On the first day they did the washing.

On the second day they worked in the garden.

On the third day they went out visiting.

On the fourth day they cleaned the house.

On the next day, Bennie woke up and said: "When will my Mama come home?" And his Papa said "She'll come home tonight because she loves you so but I'm here to look after you all today. We've got lots to do. Today we've got to make her a welcome home cake." And they did. It was a special carrot cake with nuts and a red flower on top. So—

On the first day they did the washing.

On the second day they worked in the garden.

On the third day they went out visiting.

On the fourth day, they cleaned the house.

On the fifth day they made a cake.



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And that afternoon just before dinner, they all went down to the airport to get their Mama. When she came she gave her little boy Bennie the biggest hug you ever did see because she loved him SO much. And then she gave all the others a big hug too because she loved them all so much too.

So their Mama DID come home again and she very happily helped them to eat up all the special cake! And that night Bennie went to bed very happy that his Mama was there to tuck him into bed and kiss him goodnight once more