



Tips on Dealing with Separation Anxiety

Separation anxiety is normal

It is normal for children to experience separation anxiety at all different ages. Research has shown that it is most common between the ages of 8 months and 3 years. The degree of anxiety may vary from day to day. One day your child may be smiling, laughing and playing when you leave while the next day, he/she may be crying. Always know that most of the time, children stop crying and become engaged in classroom activities with their teacher and other children within a few minutes of the parent leaving. Parents are not the cause of separation anxiety; however they can make things better or worse for the child.

Factors that may contribute to separation anxiety

- Tiredness
- Illness
- Changes in normal routines at home or at school
- Family changes including birth of a sibling, separation, divorce, death or illness
- Holidays
- Change in caregiver
- Change in weather or time of year

Ways to help a child cope with separation anxiety

- Help the child become more familiar with the new surroundings and/or people who will be caring for him/her. If possible, visit your new childcare setting with your child once or twice so that you both can experience the new environment together.
- Always say goodbye. Never sneak away from your child. Get down on eye level and tell your child that you are leaving but you will return. If your child is old enough to understand, tell him/her when you will be back. For example, don't tell your child that you will return at 3:30 pm. Tell him/her that you will return after naptime and snack. Then, make sure that you are back when you said that you would return.

- Don't take too long to say goodbye. Once you leave do not come right back. Always feel free to call and check on your child 10 or 15 minutes after you have left. Do not prolong your goodbye because it only makes it worse for your child.
- When you leave give a quick kiss and hug goodbye. Try to not let yourself get upset or cry. We understand that as parents we get emotional when our children cry. If you need to cry, say goodbye and don't let your child see. It will only make it worse for him/her.
- Create routines with your child. When exposing your child to a new childcare setting or a new caregiver, try to keep everything else in his/her life consistent. Try to stay with the same routines at home as much as possible.
- Understand and accept your child's anxiety but do not give him/her excessive sympathy.
- Never make fun of your child or scold him/her for being upset.
- At the end of the day, focus on the positive things that happened while you were away. Instead of eating dinner in front of the tv, talk with your child about the great things that happened at school while eating dinner at the table. This will help him/her focus on the good parts of his/her day.
- Do not let your child watch scary movies. This only puts distressed images in his/her head.