



Separation Anxiety in Young Children Parent Tips

We've all witnessed or experienced separation anxiety first hand. Separation anxiety happens most often at 9 months and peaks at 12-24 months. Being separated from what is known and comfortable can be difficult. Some children say goodbye and step right into the classroom without a backward glance. Others have a hard time leaving the parent's protective arms. Sometimes it is the parent who has a hard time letting go. Be encouraged, the behavior points to a close, trusting relationship between you and your child.

What are the most common reasons for separation anxiety? To begin, the child fears the parent will not return. Children this age have little concept of time. The fear of strangers can make children apprehensive. And there are children who have difficulty with transitions. Parents need to factor in if the child is ill, tired or experiencing too many changes in the routine. Are there changes in the family like a death, divorce, serious illness or other stressful circumstance? If so, **please** notify your child's teacher. As parents, we're not usually the cause of separation anxiety, but we can make things better or worse. Try these tips to assist your child in transitioning.

- Pray for a smooth transition for you and your child.
- Visit the school prior to the first day. Check out the playground.
- Meet the teacher(s) before school actually starts.
- Give your child something to love from home (a stuffed animal he can keep in his cubby).
- Send a photograph of your family in a plastic bag.
- Everyday, tell your child, "I love you. I'll always come back for you." Be on time!
- Daily, spend a few moments talking with the teacher. When your child sees you building a relationship with the teacher, your child will be more likely to do the same.
- Arrange a play date outside of class to encourage new friendships.
- Avoid the temptation to show up at the classroom prior to the end of the school day.
- Laugh with your child! It's hard to be anxious in the middle of a belly laugh.
- Use a babysitter to get child acclimated to other adults.
- Remind the child of previous brave things he or she has done.
- Empathize, but be firm. Do not scold or bribe.
- Focus on the positive things that happen at preschool. Don't dwell on fears.
- Make shopping for school supplies a special event just for the child.
- When leaving, give a quick kiss, a hug, and cheerful goodbye. Think Band-Aid removal!
- Avoid lingering or coming back to see how your child is doing.
- Don't sneak out of the room. A clearly stated goodbye builds trust.
- Read children's books that deal with separating from the family. We recommend:
The Kissing Hand by Penn, Harper and Leak *Llama Llama Misses Mama* by Dewdney
The Good-bye Book by Viorst and Chorao *I Love You All Day Long* by Rusackas and Burris
David and the Worry Beast: Helping Children Cope with Anxiety by Guanci and Attia

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