



Separation Anxiety

What is separation anxiety in children?

Separation anxiety is children's common and normal fear of being away from their parents and family. These anxieties are a normal part of development and are nothing to be concerned about.

Helping children with separation anxiety

If your child is suffering from separation anxiety, there are lots of things you can do to help.

In new places

- If you are leaving your child in a new setting – preschool, child care, friend's house, or with a babysitter – spend time at the new place with your child before the separation. Your child will be less distressed if he/she is left in a safe, familiar place with trusted people.
- Let your child take a "lovie" from home, like a teddy bear, pillow or blanket. These objects will help your child feel safer, and you can gradually phase them out as he/she feels more settled in the new place.
- Tell your child's preschool teacher about any separation anxiety, and let them know what you are doing to help your child. This way, other people in your child's environment can give consistent support.
- Gently encourage your child to separate from you through practice. It is important to have positive experiences of separations and reunions. Avoiding separations from your child can make the problem worse.

When you are leaving your child

- Tell your child when you are leaving and when you will be back. This is helpful even with babies. Sneaking out without saying goodbye can make things worse. Your child might feel confused or upset when he realizes you are not around and might be harder to settle the next time you leave.
- Settle your child in an enjoyable activity before you leave.
- Say goodbye to your child briefly – do not drag it out. Keep a relaxed and happy look on your face when you are leaving. If you seem worried or sad, your child may think the place is not safe and get upset too.

At home

- No matter how frustrated you feel, avoid criticizing or being negative about your child's difficulty with separation. For example, avoid saying 'Don't be such a baby'.
- Read books or make up stories with your child about separation fears – for example, 'Once upon a time, there was a little bunny who did not want to leave his mommy. He was afraid of what he might find outside his burrow ...' This might help your child not feel alone in being separated from his/her parents.
- Make a conscious effort to foster your child's self-esteem by giving lots of positive attention when he/she is brave about being away from you.