

WHEN YOU ARE AWAY FROM YOUR CHILD

Separation Anxiety

When infants reach 4 to 5 months, they begin to realize they are individuals. At this age, they may experience stronger anxiety around unfamiliar adults or caregivers. As infants reach 8 months, they start to become attached to adults who are special to them or who spend a lot of time with them, but they may begin to experience separation anxiety when being dropped off at their childcare center. Toddlers about 18 months old also go through this phase, which is known as separation anxiety. It is a normal part of child development. During this phase, children do not want to be separated from their parents or from other familiar adults.

Infants and toddlers who experience separation anxiety do not like adults to leave or say goodbye, which may be difficult when leaving your child at a childcare center. Your child may cling to you and cry as you leave. Remember that separation anxiety is a normal phase in your child's life, and it will get better.

How can I deal with separation anxiety?

- Prepare children for your leaving. Tell them where you are going and when you will be back.
- Make sure to say goodbye each time you leave. This will help children understand that you are leaving but that you will come back to pick them up. Children may have a difficult time adjusting when you do not tell them goodbye.
- Let children know who is picking them up at the end of the day, so they will know what to expect.
- Ask the childcare provider to hang pictures of your family where your child can see them during the day.

- Provide a consistent goodbye routine so that your child is not confused or upset.
- Try to help children gradually adjust to the person who will be taking care of them.
- Let children take something familiar to the childcare setting like their favorite toy or blanket.
- Facilitate proper social and emotional development.
- Teach and model appropriate methods of self-soothing.
- Build proper attachment with your child.

How can I help my child's social and emotional development?

One of the most important ways to teach your infant or toddler social and emotional development is to respond promptly to his or her needs, which also builds attachment with your baby. For infants, make sure to respond to their cries. Even if you can't immediately pick them up, respond by talking to them so they know you are there and you hear them. Also, when you are unable to respond, teach your infant a way to self-soothe by using the same method to distract them when you are able to respond immediately. For instance, make a favorite toy available to your infant to provide comfort and familiarity. This toy can also be used during separation at drop-off at the childcare center in the morning. You can also soothe your child by singing a favorite nursery rhyme. As your child begins to learn to talk, they can recite this song during times of frustration or anger. It is also important to validate your child's feelings and teach them to cope with feelings appropriately.

Following are some books that you can read to your child to prepare for school:

The Kissing Hand by Audrey Penn

Llama Llama Misses Mama by Anna Dewdney

Owl Babies by Martin Waddell

I Love You All Day Long by Francesca Rusackas

You Go Away by Dorothy Corey

Mama Always Comes Home by Karma Wilson



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