

# SEPARATION ANXIETY

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Separation anxiety is a normal stage in child development. Whether it is at 10 months, or 5 years – each and every child needs to learn independence from Mom and Dad. This is the time when your child learns to trust that you will return for them. During this vital stage in development, a child gradually becomes confident in the relationship you and he/she share. This whole process may last a few days or several months – depending on the child, and the way separation is dealt with. Listed below are a few tips for easing separation anxiety for both you and your child.

- Keep a positive attitude. No matter how sad or guilty you may feel about leaving your child, it is important to show them that you have confidence in them – and that you have confidence in the person you are leaving them with
- Prepare you child. Talk about daycare / school and how much fun they will have with their friends. Remind them of the fun they had the previous day. It is also helpful to involve your child in preparing for daycare (packing their bag).
- Allow your child to bring a special toy / stuffy / blanket from home. This helps them feel connected to you throughout the day.
- Keep a consistent schedule. Children are very quick to associate parents arrival with daycare schedules. If they see other children leaving before them – they become fearful that Mom / Dad have forgotten them. Routine and structure are vital in easing separation anxiety.
- Keep goodbyes to a minimum. Develop a good bye routine BEFORE arriving to daycare – and make your exit quick and painless. Handing your child over to the adult in charge shows your child they are in good hands. Prolonging goodbyes will make your child clingy and fearful. Once again keep up a good front. Remain positive. Do not show your child you are also feeling anxious.
- Keep weekend schedules as close to daycare schedules as possible. Routine and structure will help your child learn what to expect – and prevent them from having to continually re-adjust to daycare life.
- Keep care providers as consistent as possible. Continually changing childcare arrangements will cause your child to feel insecure about the whole daycare process. Once again, routine and structure are the key ingredients in easing separation anxiety.

## SEPARATION REGRESSION

Separation regression occurs for children who have overcome the initial separation hurdle. This is typically caused by a change/interruption in your child's life or schedule. Children who are at a greater risk of developing separation regression are those whose parent/s work shift, are not living together, have different people bringing /picking them up from daycare, and a child who has had daycare routine interrupted. ANY change in schedule will affect a child's sense of security; especially at daycare, eg. a new sibling, routine, daycare friend, and even a parent's change in schedule. This can be very easy to overcome or can be a very long and stressful ordeal; once again depending on how the regression is dealt with. Separation regression differs from typical separation anxiety. EACH regression creates anxiety and slows down healthy social development

Typical problems that arise from a child who is constantly regressing are night terrors, sleep disturbances, toilet issues, and behavior problems (both at home and at daycare). Confidence is one of the most important life skill that daycare teaches children. Please help your child build their confidence by showing them that you are also confident; in both them and their daycare experience.

The easiest way to "get back on track" is to, once again keep goodbyes to a minimum; making them quick and painless. Once a pattern has been set for separation regression; children are quick to develop the habit of making goodbyes painful for both themselves and parents. This not only creates anxiety for you and your child; it creates anxiety for those that are witnessing the regression. Please note.....

For habitual regression meltdowns: Remaining firm and calm during meltdowns will help your child understand that you need to leave; and pleading, crying, or screaming will not change this. This is where it is crucial to keep goodbyes to a minimum. A healthy separation for children should be less than 2 minutes. Anything beyond that will start to create anxiety for your child. The longer the goodbye; the more anxiety your child feels (and the larger their outlet will be for release). Stress release for small children is usually physical; and seen in the form of crying, kicking, screaming, hitting, and biting. Believe it or not; children feel a sense of relief once the separation is over; and usually calm "themselves" within 1-5 minutes.

TIP: If habitual meltdowns occur with only one parent; this is an indication of a formed habit. If children only cry with Dad (but not Mom) you can be assured that real separation anxiety is not an issue. This is easily resolved with keeping the same goodbye routine as the parent who does not experience separation issues.