

Separation Anxiety- Tips For Easing Goodbyes

By Robin McClure

Some children can't wait to try a new adventure, meet new friends, or stay at a new care setting. Other kids, however, become anxious and even fearful of separating from a parent. What to do? Here are some tips to make separations go more smoothly.

- Talk with your child--even a young one--about what the new arrangement will be in advance, and have your child talk about what it might be like. Answer any questions your kid might have. Be sure to explain that the separation is only for a time, but that you will always return. If you set a time, be sure to stick to it.
- Make arrangements to stay with a child for a while for the first few days at a day care center, care setting, or school. Your child will be comforted knowing that you are part of the adjustment to the new routine.
- Let your child bring a favorite toy, stuffed animal, or blanket for comfort. Some children also like having a family picture to reference during the day. Do be sure to find out in advance whether items from home are allowed.
- Be sure to talk about your child's emotions with the caregiver or teacher. If possible, have your child meet the adult who will be caring for your child in advance of the first day of the new setting. Let your child know that this adult will take care of them in your absence.
- Tell your child that you will stay for a certain period of time, and then will leave. Then, stick with the plan. Believe the caregiver who says the child will calm down once the parent is gone. This is true in almost every situation, and the child most always is fine within minutes after a parent's departure. Caregivers and teachers report that parents who stay past the transition period often cause more disruption and confusion than reassurance with a child.
- If possible, watch outside the room and see for yourself how quickly your child adjusts. This is often very reassuring for the parent.
- Reunite with your child in a positive way at the end of each day, and don't be in such a rush that you don't look at artwork or hear about special activities. Your child wants to tell you about his/her day, and a way to keep separation sadness at a minimum is to make happy connections when you get back together.
- While rare, there are times when a child simply does not adjust to a new care situation. If your child seems hysterical day after day and is not taking to a setting after a couple of weeks or so, it may be that you will need to consider another option. Before making another change, however, visit with the caregiver or teacher and see if there are additional measures that can be taken to make the adjustment. In the end, parents know what is best for their child.