



Topic of the Month- Separation Anxiety

In early childhood, crying, tantrums, or clinginess are healthy reactions to separation and a normal stage of development. Separation Anxiety usually consists of excessive fear of being away from an item or a figure, when it comes to children this tends to be mom, dad, or a caregiver. If this occurs before age three that's okay. When children become three is when children typically want to find their own way. Separation anxiety can begin before a child's first birthday, and may pop up again or last until a child is four years old. However, both the intensity level and timing of separation anxiety vary extremely from child to child. A little worry over leaving mom or dad is normal, even when your child is older. You can ease your child's separation anxiety by staying patient and consistent, and by gently but firmly setting limits. Some children however can experience separation anxiety that doesn't go away, sometimes even with the parents' best efforts.

Symptoms of Separation Anxiety:

- Fear of being alone
- Nightmares about being separated
- Bed wetting
- Complaints of physical symptoms, headaches, stomach aches, on school days
- Repeated temper tantrums or pleading
- Clinging to caregiver/ parent
- Excessive distress when separated from the home, parents or caregivers
- Worry about losing or harm coming to caregiver or parents
- Not wanting to leave home, school and or another place due to separation



Separation Anxiety can be difficult for the child and the caregiver or parent, as we know seeing our loved ones in distress can be heartbreaking. Separation anxiety from a parent or caregiver is typical in the early years of development however when the anxiety becomes a barrier in the child's development it can become an issue.

Some of the causes for Separation Anxiety may be:

- Loss of a loved one or pet
- Change of schools
- Divorce of parents
- Children who lack a strong support system
- Children who witness a traumatic event
- Children who may suffer from mental health issues



To help cope with the feeling of separation anxiety children must feel safe and cared for in their environments. Children must also trust their parents and caregivers that they will return. It is helpful for a parent or caregiver to attend medical appointments when possible (dentist, doctor, and specialist). It may also be helpful to explain what is going to happen during the procedure. Separation anxiety can last various lengths of time depending on the child and how the parent responds.

How Separation Anxiety might make parents and caregivers feel

Separation anxiety can make parents and caregivers feel a variety of emotions. It can be wonderful to feel that your child is attached to you and you are to them. But as a parent or caregiver you are likely to feel some sort of guilt for having to leave your loved one. Sometimes, you might even feel overwhelmed by how much attention your child needs from you. Remember, your little one's unwillingness to leave you is a sign that good attachment has developed between yourself and the child. At some point your child will be able to remember that you will return after you leave, and that they will be comforted while you are away. This also allows for your little one to learn coping skills and independence.



Making goodbyes easier for you and your little one

Timing is everything: Try not to start daycare or childcare with unfamiliar faces, If possible take your little one to meet the daycare and /or childcare providers. This way your little one will be familiar with the space and staff.

Practice: Practice being away from your little one. Introduce new people and places slowly. If you are leaving your child with a relative or babysitter invite them over beforehand so your child can get to know them.

Be calm and consistent: Come up with a "Goodbye" routine where you say a pleasant, loving and firm goodbye to your little one. Make sure you stay calm and show confidence in your child. Always reassure them that you will be back. Make sure you give your full attention to your child during this time. Coming back and not sticking to your plan only makes things worse.

Follow through on promises: It's important as parents and caregivers that we follow through on what we have promised. This is a huge factor in your child's confidence development.



Things to keep in mind

As hard as it may be to leave your loved one crying and in distress it is important to have confidence in your little one and that the caregiver and /or daycare staff can handle the situation when you are gone. Most often, by the time you get to your car your child is off playing with other children or other things that peak their interest. Remember, that this phase will pass. It is only temporary. If your child has never been cared for by anyone other than you, it is only natural to be shy and anxious.

Sources:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/conditions/separation-anxiety>

<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/sep-anxiety.html>