

Take Home Tips



Early Learning

Child care challenges: separation anxiety tips

Remember that the behavior is normal. Although some kids never experience separation anxiety, for most, separation anxiety typically emerges around 9 to 12 months, and sometimes as early as 6 months, and can come and go through a child's early years. After babyhood, bouts of separation anxiety tend to crop up in the presence of other life stressors, such as moving, travel, divorce, or a new caregiver or classroom.

Time your departure strategically. If possible, time your departure with a fun distraction for your child. We have found departures to be easier when we leave in time for the sitter to break out a new toy or offer a fun snack or fruit dessert we have prepared.

Allocate extra time. Whether during day care drop-off or once the sitter arrives at your home, prepare to spend a little more time to help your child get engaged in an activity before you leave.

Talk it out. As you prepare to leave, tell your child, for example, that you will be back after their fun day of playing with friends, doing art activities, reading books, and eating snacks. These reminders can help get kids excited about being at school.

Keep departures brief. Parents often want to run back and offer consolation when their child cries, but every time you do this you train your child to keep crying so you come back. It's easiest for everyone if you keep your goodbyes short and sweet. Children typically recover soon after you leave.

Get your game face on. Your child is well attuned to your emotions. If you exude calm and confidence, they will feel more trusting of their caregiver, whereas if you look anxious and worried, they will mirror your emotions. Say your goodbyes with a confident smile and wave to help your child get off to a better start.

Don't ask if it's ok to leave. Remember that you are in charge. Do not ask permission to leave; your child will likely say no!

Do not sneak out. Resist the urge to sneak out to avoid a painful separation. Sneaking out will only cause your child confusion when they turn around and discover that you are gone, and repeated sneak outs will erode their trust.

Use a transitional object. Transition objects can be very helpful for kids experiencing separation anxiety. Younger kids often find comfort in a favorite blankie or stuffed animal. Older kids may find it comforting to keep a small reminder of mom or dad in their pocket, such as an inexpensive pendant or a small smooth stone.

Caregiver consistency. Kids like consistency, so whenever possible, try to book the same sitter, or opt for a family member or teacher from the day care. This will also help you feel more comfortable leaving. If you are confident in the way the caregiver distracts and handles the separation anxiety, you'll feel more comfortable leaving.



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