

# Separation Anxiety



Separation Anxiety is how we describe the feelings some children have when they are apart from those who make them feel safest – often their parents or carers. Most babies and children will find separation hard at times. Separation anxiety is an expected developmental stage. Some children will struggle with it for longer and at different times because of their life experiences and / or individual personality.

## Why is my child showing separation anxiety?

At around six months old you will probably notice that your baby worries when you are out of sight. Developmentally your baby has realised that they are a separate person from you and can be left behind. This is hard for them and often the beginning of some 'separation anxiety'. For the next few years you will probably notice some times when they seem 'clingy' and upset when they can't be close to you. Some children will continue to feel separation anxiety throughout childhood - some or all of the time. It might be triggered by upsets or changes in their life that make them feel 'wobbly' or they may just be more prone to worrying.

If your baby or child has separation anxiety they may well get very upset at parting from you. It can be hard for parents to understand what it is all about, but the feelings and worry about being separated from you are very real for your child.

Whatever the age of your child your understanding of how hard this feels for them is important. The way you react and support them can help them feel better and less worried about being apart. It may take time to build their confidence but it is important they learn that they can cope and you are both still safe when separated.

### Things That Will Help

The age of your child and the reason they are finding being apart from you hard will affect the way you support them.

As with all anxieties it is best not to avoid the thing that is causing the worry. Your child needs to learn that they are safe and you will always come back. Every child is different and going at the right pace for them is important.

### My Child is Worried About Starting School

Starting school is a big step for children and their families. Most children will have some days when they are not keen to go. For some the early weeks and months at school can be really tough, as they adjust to new people and experiences.

You can help your child settle by;

Letting them see the school on open days (or look online when this can't happen). Walk around the outside. Practice the walk to school.

Talking about the routine of the school day so they know when you will be there to collect them.

Having a short but 'special' goodbye and the same for 'hello' at the end of the day. It might mean a funny handshake or it could be a rhyme or special words you say to each other. These routines can help your child feel secure and build confidence that you go - but also come back.

A teddy in your pockets can help too – you have small teddy and so does your child. Agree to swap and look after each other's teddy for the time you are apart. It gives another message that you will be back for them (and your teddy).

Talk to school if you think your child might struggle. They are used to giving extra support to children.

Build in time to just be with them after school and at weekends. Encourage them to talk about their day and their feelings.

### Who Can Help?

If you are worried about the effect COVID-19 has had on your child, talk to school or call Just One Number to talk to a health professional. You can contact the Healthy Child Programme by calling Just One Number on 0300 300 0123 or texting Parentline on 07520 631590. Our opening hours are 8am-6pm Monday-Friday (excluding bank holidays) and 9am-1pm on Saturdays.