

Separation Anxiety Disorder

Separation anxiety is normal in very young children. It starts when they are between 10-18 months old, and typically disappears by the time they are 3 years old.



For some children, however, their separation anxiety continues or gets worse.

These are some of the things they may experience:



They frequently show **excessive distress** when they know they have to leave home or their caregiver.



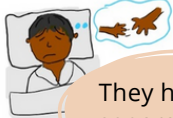
They **worry that something bad will happen** to cause them to separate from their caregiver.



They **find it extremely difficult to be alone** (even at home), or without caregivers in other settings.



They persistently **refuse or show reluctance to go away from home** because they do not want to separate from their caregivers.



They have **nightmares** involving separating from caregivers.

They are often **reluctant, or refuse, to sleep without being near caregivers.**



They **worry a lot about losing their caregivers or about their caregivers getting hurt.**



They **make repeated complaints of physical symptoms** (e.g., stomachache) when they know they will be separated from their caregivers.



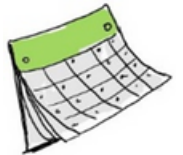
The anxiety and worry or physical symptoms that they experience tend to cause them a significant amount of distress. **They are often unable to function in activities that most children can take part in.**



It is normal for children to take about 4 weeks to adjust to separating from their parents such as when they start school.



However, if the symptoms last longer than this, and causes the child significant distress, **it is important to seek help from a professional.**



Intervention for Separation Anxiety Disorder usually involves working with the child and parents.

The goal of intervention is usually to **increase coping and decrease anxiety symptoms.**



Tips to help children with Separation Anxiety Disorder

1. Reassure your child once, at most twice, then stop

Make sure you acknowledge your child's feelings, but **give your child confidence that they will be okay**. You can reassure your child warmly if they do not want to be away from you

Reassure once, at most twice, then stop doing so. **You can support them warmly with your actions** (e.g., hold their hands, give them a squeeze).



For example:

- "I know you don't want to go to school, but I know you will be okay there."

2. Keep goodbyes brief

Before leaving, tell your child that you will be dropping them off. Then, **drop off your child briskly, smile and say goodbye**.

3. Acknowledge your child's anxiety

When picking your child up, give them a smile and praise (e.g., well done going to school today).

Sometimes we may feel that way, but school is important for learning and growing up. I know you can be okay in school!



If they still mention that they are sad or dislike being away from you, **acknowledge their anxiety and let them know they can be okay**.

4. Praise child's participation in school

See if you can find pictures of your child participating nicely and smiling during class.

Show the pictures to them to **praise them for joining in and participating well in school**.



Good job joining in Teacher Jenny's art class today! The crafts you made are so beautiful!



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Please seek help from a qualified healthcare provider if you have any
concerns regarding your child's behaviour.

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