



Separation Anxiety

Pediatrician Cathryn Tobin describes separation anxiety as “a little one's way of saying how much they really don't want to say good-bye”. We agree, and can testify to the fact that a good portion of preschool children experience it at some point in their early lives. Although there are a variety of reasons, most often separation anxiety is purely a “missing mom/dad” issue. The first day of playschool will no doubt be tough for some parents too. We want to reassure you; we will call you if your child becomes inconsolable (however keep in mind we’ve only ever made that call once in the last 18 years). We do all we can to ensure your child copes with the changes they will experience that first week of playschool. More often than not, minutes after you transfer your child into our care, they settle and slowly get interested in the activities and people around them.

“Distraction” is a strategy we use to help children cope with separation anxiety. We attempt to peak the child’s interest in activities in the hope they will willingly engage with their peers and separate sooner.

Here are some additional ideas

- Keep your good-bye short and sweet. In doing so you convey the message that you have confidence in your child’s ability to cope.
- Don’t “hover” around. Your child will sense your anxiety and this will make it more difficult for him/her to settle.
- Tuck a picture or a loving reminder away in your child’s backpack for him/her to look at when needed.
- Don’t sneak out. You want your child to know you can be trusted. Say goodbye and re-state your promise to be back when playschool is over.
- Develop a goodbye routine like a high-five, special hug, or nose rub you both enjoy.
- Don’t bribe or bargain with your child to behave. Your child should be allowed to freely express their feelings.
- Send a clear message. Your child needs to know that you expect him to stay no matter how much they fuss.
- Don’t take your child home. If you do, you transmit the message that **when** your child cries, **then** they can go home.
- In time, plan play dates so your child can forge relationships that will help make the transition easier.
- Don’t get upset. By maintaining an upbeat and positive attitude about playschool, you’ll help your child feel safe, secure and happy about going **and** staying.
- Don’t be surprised if you feel like you are starting at square one again after holidays and sick days.
- Believe in your child’s ability to comfort him/herself and to make positive changes.

*Remember - Separation Anxiety means that a strong and loving bond exists between you and your child.

(Cathryn Tobin, M.D., is a pediatrician, midwife and member of the Canadian Pediatric Society)