



Education

Preventing Separation Anxiety

Leaving a child with a babysitter or in child care can be stressful for both parent and child. For the child, the fear related to the parent leaving his or her sight is called separation anxiety. Most parents also have separation anxiety to some degree when they have to leave their children.

Separation anxiety is a normal part of development when children start understanding more about people and places. It is most common between 6 months and 2 years of age.

If your child starts to have trouble when you drop her off at child care or with a babysitter there are several things you can do to help.

- Do not talk about the separation beforehand. This does not help and may make separating more difficult.
- Plan ahead so that you can separate quickly. Have all of your child's things together in one bag or her toys out in one place so that you won't drag out the separation.
- When it comes time to do so, leave as quickly and as matter-of-factly as possible. Say goodbye and give your child a quick kiss. Do not try to sneak away when the child is not looking.
- If separating is hard for you, set up times to practice separating. For example, arrange to drop your child off at a friend's or relative's house several times each week for a short time until it gets easier for you.
- When you pick your child up, don't be overly emotional. It's OK to act glad to see her, but don't start crying and hugging her too much. This only shows your child how hard the separation was for you.
- Generally the way children handle separation reflects how their parents handle it. Parents usually do not cause separation anxiety, but they can make things worse or better. It helps if you stay calm and reassuring.

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