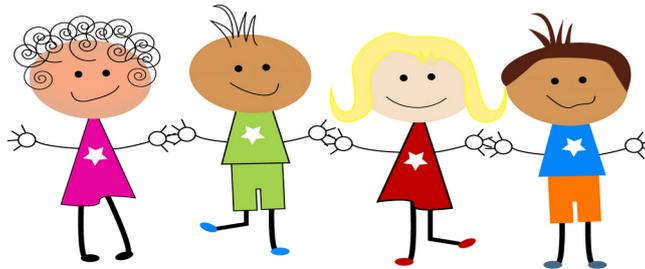




Tips for Dealing with Separation Anxiety in Preschool and School-Age Children



Play Separation Games – You can reduce the stress of separation by making it less intimidating through casual practice. A good game to play is hide-and-seek, which you can play in the house or at the park or playground. Another option is to have a treasure hunt, where your child follows clues around the house or yard to find a surprise at the end.

Tell your child what to expect – you can eliminate fears if you tell your child specific information about upcoming times of separation. If you are going to the store and leaving him/her with grandma, explain where you are going, what he/she will do while you're gone, and when you'll be back. Describe in detail what to expect, as children are often fearful of the unknown. If separations occur without any warning, children begin looking over their shoulder for the next unexpected event. Talk about it in a relaxed and encouraging manner possibly a few days or week in advance, depending on their age. Avoid talking about their fears or concerns while you're away, unless they bring it up. If they do, acknowledge these feelings without giving them too much power.

Promise to Return, and then Remind your Child of the Promise – A brief statement about your return can be very helpful. Try to tie your return to an event, for example, "I'll be outside waiting when the school bell rings". When you return, remind him of the promise, "See? I was waiting right outside when the bell rang, just like I promised".

Understand the age-appropriateness of the Anxiety – Separation anxiety is a normal and biologically necessary emotion. It is a sign of your child's deep love and attachment to you. It isn't something your child can control by himself/herself, and it

isn't something he/she is doing to annoy you. It is a phase children outgrow over time, and it is a process that can be moved along.

Allow your child to warm up to new situations – Don't force your child to go far beyond his/her comfort zone. Allow them to observe the situation, learn about it, and approach it a bit at a time. Many children will relax when they know they have permission to take their time getting involved.

Introduce new people gradually – Be sure to hold your child's hand or put your arm around him/her, require no more than a hello, do not demand that your child have a conversation with this new person. It is okay to answer for your child in these situations so he/she can warm up before fully participating.

Tell stories that Teach – Explain an upcoming event in an indirect way that takes the spotlight off their own participation and helps them examine the situation from an outsider's point of view. Do this by telling your child a story using familiar characters that he likes and putting them into the situation that he'll be facing. For example: SpongeBob can go to visit his aunt and spend the night at her house. This allows your child to explore it from someone else's perspective before he/she has to face it himself. Try and do this several times over a week or two prior to your child's actual event so that by the time it's his/her turn, it will feel more familiar.