

Coping with Separation Anxiety for Children

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Share information with the caregiver: Share your child's unique likes, dislikes, fears, eating/sleeping habits and anything else that will help the caregiver understand your child, ease the transition and provide care that is reasonably consistent with yours.

Visit the new setting with your child. Show children where they will be eating, sleeping and playing, and introduce the new caregiver.

Shorten the first few days: Shorter days will give your child more time to adjust and allow him/her to learn that you will return.

Build trust: Let your child see you and the caregiver building a friendly relationship. Include the three of you in a brief conversation or play activity.

Prepare the night before: An unhurried, pleasant start to the day is crucial to successful separations. If the child is old enough, involve him/her in the packing of lunches and the selection and laying out of clothes.

Something from home: Young children often use an object from home to comfort themselves (such as a favourite teddy or blanket). Eventually, the need for these "cozies" or transition objects diminishes.

On the way the first day: Have a calm, positive attitude. Sing a favourite song or talk about what the child or you will be doing today. In terms the child will understand, explain where/when you will be picking him/her up.

Develop a goodbye ritual: Plan a special way to say goodbye, such as a wave through the window or a lipstick kiss stamped on the back of the child's hand.

Take time to say goodbye: Leave your child with a positive attitude of what you will do together at the end of the day. Regardless of how tempting it may seem, never sneak out while the child is distracted. This destroys trust and will encourage the child to cling more on future occasions.

Avoid repeated goodbyes: Once you say "I am leaving now" and go through the established goodbye ritual, then go. Stalling can make the child more fearful and clingy.

Accept and listen to negative feelings: Telling children that they are too big to cry only aggravates their fears and fails to help them understand their true feelings. Saying, "I know you are feeling sad. I will miss you too" is more helpful.

