

Separation Anxiety Tips for the New School Year

Please note that it is normal and expected for children to have some level of separation anxiety the first few weeks of a new school year—new friends, a new teacher, a new classroom—it's a lot to take in! In addition, some children simply have more anxious personalities by nature, and will always have short periods of discomfort during transitions, such as having to say goodbye to a parent. But that doesn't mean they won't have an awesome day full of learning and development, once they move past that initial anxiety. They will! The best thing you can do to help during the transition period is to be understanding, but also firm and consistent.

Introduce your child to the idea that change is coming in a very upbeat and positive way. Children take verbal and nonverbal cues from their parents. If they see that you are fine with the change, they will feel safer. You could say something like, "I'm so happy for you to get to have a new teacher this week. You will learn fun things this year and get to make new friends!" Likewise, if you ever have any concerns about the teacher, classroom, policy or curriculum, make sure you address that privately with school administration (so we can help resolve your concerns asap) rather than venting within ear reach of a child. They pick up on more than you think!

Prolonged good-byes at the door are usually not a good idea and will only lead to an anxious child getting even more upset. It's best for the child to learn that acting up will not keep a beloved parent sticking around longer. Saying, "I love you and I'll be back, but I have to leave now" and then leaving promptly is absolutely the right thing to do—even if you have to leave your sweet child crying in the arms of the teacher. It's hard to do, but it really will help your child feel better sooner, faster!

Remind yourself that he will calm down soon. When children realize that crying doesn't get them their way, it is remarkable how quickly they stop throwing tantrums. Often we have had parents walk away from a hysterical child and then observe their child from the lobby video monitor. It's usually quite surprising to the parents that their child has completely calmed down in just a few minutes—sometimes in just a few seconds! They'll ask, "How is that possible—she was so upset. Was she just acting?!" Well, the separation anxiety was real, but the crying is usually an attempt to see if you'll respond. When you don't, they will give up sooner than you might think and will focus instead on having fun with friends!

So while we understand that well-intentioned parents are only trying to be kind when "easing" their child into the room—prolonged goodbyes usually create the opposite effect of what is intended and can actually make it more difficult for your child to transition. Teachers are usually pretty good about stepping in to help if they see your child is upset, but don't hesitate to ask for assistance if your child is being "clingy". It may also help to develop a simple "goodbye ritual" such as a special wave through the window or blowing a goodbye kiss.

Please feel free to discuss any concerns you have with your teacher or program director. We're here to help make sure your child has a good experience this year. We're on your team to help make sure that your child has a wonderful early childhood experience, full of learning and growth. Thank you!