

Separation Anxiety

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Many children first show fear around the age of 7- 8 months. The first reactions may be simple startle reactions to loud noises or sudden movements. But a major source of fear may be new people or new situations – this stranger fear is especially common from 8 – 14 months. But other kids go through it from 18 months – 3 years. Or they may experience it when a new stress appears: a move to a new home, a new baby in the house, or starting pre-school.

Ways to reduce separation anxiety: There's lots of ideas here... if you're just going to be gone for a short while, you might use a few of these. If you're going away for an extended period, you might use them all.

- Preparation and Practice
 - Meet the caregiver in advance, spend time together, demonstrate to your child that you are comfortable with this person
 - Visit the environment in advance, get familiar with. Try a few short stays on low stress days when you don't *need* to be away, so that the child is up to a longer stay when you do.
 - Prepare your child– talk about when/where you'll be going, and also talk about when you'll be back. Sometimes talking about this upsets your child, but better that than to be surprised to discover you gone. When talking about this, show confidence that they will handle it well
 - Read books about parents going away and coming back. Find some recommendations here: www.disneybaby.com/blog/7-books-to-help-ease-separation-anxiety/
- Packing for the separation (if the caregiver is coming to your home, show them where to find these!)
 - Make sure your child has some familiar objects – favorite books, or toys, comfort foods
 - Consider a special activity for your child (e.g. blowing bubbles may be a guaranteed pleasure for your child whether or not you're there)
 - Give them part of you to hold on to – a picture of you, a love note from you, a recording of your voice that a caregiver can play if they're feeling lonely
- When the time comes to separate: Say goodbye briefly before leaving, be cheery and positive demonstrating your confidence that they'll be fine while you're gone
 - Don't try to sneak out! Your child may cry when you leave, but will soon settle down. But if you sneak out, that's very distressing when your child notices you're gone.
- Ask your caregiver not to mention you unless the child brings you up, but if they do, then to calmly and simply explain where you are and when you'll be back, then encourage the child to play.
- Don't call on the phone. Your child may be happily settled in, and the phone call may upset them.
- Be casual when you return: In the book Owl Babies, when the mother comes home, she says "What's all the fuss? You knew I'd come back." And the babies say "I knew it." If your child tells you (or shows you) that they were sad that you were gone, you can empathize with that, but also reinforce that they were safe and well cared for while you were gone, and you came back just as you had promised.