

Relationships that Nurture

Monthly tips provided by St. David's Center in partnership with Mom Enough

Separation Anxiety

Audio can be heard at the end of the [2/20/12 ME interview](#)

The majority of children show some form of separation anxiety at some point in their childhood, quite often between infancy and toddlerhood. It seems appropriate that a young child would feel anxious when the person who protects and cares for them is absent. It is important for your child to feel a sense of security in his or her caregivers.

As difficult as separation anxiety can be, with understanding and patience, you and your child will get through it. Typically, separation anxiety fades as your child becomes more accustomed to experiences with familiar, safe caretakers. Over time, your child will learn that when you leave, you will come back.

Here are some ways to support children experiencing separation anxiety:

I. Practice with small amounts of time and someone familiar

- Start with 15 minutes building up to one hour away from you – build up gradually to help your child become more comfortable with the caregiver
- Choose people they are familiar with being around – your child may still be upset, but he or she is more likely to adjust quickly when the child has a relationship with the caregiver

II. Prepare your child

- If leaving your child with someone he or she doesn't know, give your child an opportunity to get to know the person
- Use photos – have pictures of caregivers and spaces available ahead of time
- Talk about visiting and what that will be like – let your child know what is going to happen
- Read books to your child about visiting others

III. Be consistent in your transition

- Routines and rituals are reassuring and important – be sure the caregiver is aware of your child's routines and maintains them and have some transition items in place for your child: a favorite blanket, snack and/or picture of you
- Help your child transition to the caregiver and give them time to transition – ask the sitter or caregiver to come early or plan to stay a bit when you drop them off
- Always say goodbye; don't just disappear, which can cause more anxiety for your child
- Don't prolong the goodbye; a kiss and a big hug is sufficient – coming back to check in is difficult for your child, sends a mixed message and can escalate sadness or anxiety
- Don't forget that children are highly intuitive – they can feel your emotions and will likely become upset if you get upset

IV. Let the child's experience be unconditional

- If he or she cries when you leave, or even after you have gone, it's okay – it's an expression of how they feel about your absence
- Acknowledge how the child felt and talk about what might help

V. Prepare for irritability or agitation when you pick up

- Don't take this personally
- Your child is learning how to be without you

VI. Remind yourself that you will get through this – be patient and consistent