

Separation Anxiety

Does your baby cry every time you move out of sight? Does your toddler throw a tantrum when you drop him off at childcare? Is your second grader reluctant to leave your side to get on the school bus in the morning? What can you do to make separations easier for you and your child? And how can you tell if your child's separation anxiety is normal or if it's a sign of some deeper problem? Here is Marti's advice on this common parenting challenge:

I. Underlying issues

- With babies, separation protest is actually healthy. At that stage, parents are the center of the child's life; his or her security is in your relationship, not yet within the child. As your child gradually learns that you always come back, he or she will internalize that feeling of security and be able to venture further away for longer periods of time.
- With major transitions (e.g. going off to daycare, starting school or even starting college) OR when the balance in the home has been upset (e.g. a new baby, family conflict or some other major change) children of any age can experience separation anxiety for a period of time.
- In today's busy world of work, work, work, children may show separation anxiety partly because they resent being rushed here and there and generally not getting as much time (or energy) from Mom and Dad as they'd like.
- If, as parents, we are feeling ambivalent about leaving our kids, they pick that up and become more upset.

II. Tips for parents for making separations easier

- Slow down the getting ready process
- Encourage "transition objects"
- Be matter of fact when leaving your child
- Relish the reunion
- Be alert to separation difficulties that go beyond what's typical
For example, if a young child consistently doesn't settle down AFTER you leave, the problem may be in the setting (e.g. poor quality childcare) or may indicate the child is struggling with other issues. For an older child, if separation anxiety interferes with age-appropriate activities and social relationships, seek professional guidance.