

Tips for Combatting Separation Anxiety

If this is the first time that your child has attended school, you may be experiencing some anxiety about the possibility of separating from your child or may be anxious about how your child will handle the separation. If this is the case, there are several steps that you can take to minimize the separation anxiety for your child.

1. Begin to talk about school. Describe what will happen in simple, positive language: "Daddy/Mommy/Nanny will take you to school. You will stay and play with your new friends and teacher while Daddy/Mommy/Nanny work/get groceries/etc. Daddy/Mommy/Nanny will come back to get you right before lunch." This gives your child a framework for understanding that the time before lunch will be the time that he/she can expect to see you again. Remember that the words that you use should be positive. Do not tell your child that you will be sad to be apart from him/her as this communicates your own anxiety about the separation. Be upbeat.
2. Practice separating from your child. If you do not have a babysitter, get one. Leave your child for short periods. When you return, always say, "I told you that I would come back. Here I am." Using this language upon your return reinforces with your child that he/she can trust you to return.
3. Visit the preschool. Open house is a perfect opportunity to become more comfortable with the preschool environment. Have a playdate with a future classmate. (Call the school if you need contact information for a classmate.) The more comfortable that your child can become with the preschool environment or his/her classmates, the easier the transition to school will be.
4. Read books from the library about going to school or separating from a parent. Two good books are *Tom Goes to Kindergarten* and *The Kissing Hand*. These books deal with separation gently and with humor.
5. When school begins the parent with whom the child has less trouble separating (often Daddy) should bring him/her to school for the first few days. Children often react better to the separation this way. In addition, do not linger at drop-off. Linger at drop-off does not minimize the separation; it only lengthens the anxiety.

While following these suggestions may lessen your child's anxiety, he/she may still have trouble separating. As you leave the classroom your child may be crying. Please know that the teachers are all experienced in dealing with separation anxiety and will work closely with you and your child to make the transition into school as smooth as possible. If you have any concerns about this issue or any other, please bring them to your child's teacher or to the Director.