

SEPTEMBER 2024

TIMELY TOPICS

JORDAN CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER



EASING SEPARATION ANXIETY

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PARENT CLASSES:

Available on YouTube:

- **Using Visual Supports to Help with Good-Byes**
- **5 Strategies to Help with Separation Anxiety**

- **See back page for QR codes and links to videos**

As a new school year begins, many parents worry about how their child will do going to school for the first time or going back to school. If your child is in early intervention, maybe you're wanting your child to attend a toddler class or daycare soon, but know the transition is going to be very rough. You might also want to be able to leave your child at home with another parent or sitter and know everything will be ok.

Most of us worry because we've tried these things before and it hasn't gone well. We want our kids to experience new things and new people. We want a little time and space for ourselves. But how can we help our child be ok without us there?

The situation can be more difficult when there are language delays or other developmental delays. How can we explain what's happening if they don't understand? Or you're the only one who understands how to comfort them or understand them or knows their routines -- so you are the only one they want.

In this issue, we'll discuss when separation anxiety usually develops, how to practice separations, how to make separations easier, as well as what to do when strategies don't work.

The Basics

What is separation anxiety?

When we think about “separation anxiety,” we picture babies or toddlers crying when their parents have to leave. Clinging to parents, crying, and tantrums are all typical responses for young children when their parents have to leave.



When does separation anxiety start?



This typically starts before a baby's first birthday. Babies get attached to their parents and other caregivers and begin to be wary of others. Many parents see this happen in the toddler months as well. Toddlers and two year olds begin to explore more but still want their parents nearby. Some will outgrow this by preschool, but many kids still have worries and fears going into elementary school.

Certain life events can also lead to your child being more fearful of you leaving such as moving, new daycare, new sibling, sleeping in own room, etc.

Why does separation anxiety happen?



Babies and young children get attached to their caregivers. Usually they are very attached to their parents, but this could also be with a particular baby-sitter or daycare teacher.

When young children start daycare, have a sitter, go to preschool, a lot changes. The biggest change is that the person they want the most is leaving them.

Young children also lack an understanding of time. When we say “I’ll be back in two hours” or “I’ll be back at dinner time” our kids are not able to understand how long that is. They just know you’re leaving right now.

Your child’s personality and temperament can also play a role in whether or not they experience separation anxiety or how intense it is.

Practice Separations

If starting daycare or a new sitter or even leaving the house for an hour seems huge and undoable at the moment, practice small, short separations at home. Create opportunities for you to say “bye” to your child and then come back almost immediately.

- 1 Enlist another adult or older sibling who could support your child during practice sessions.
- 2 Start an activity with your child and the other parent/sibling. Choose something your child enjoys (snack, toy, bath, etc). The separation is the hard part - you don't also want to have something your child doesn't like to do.
- 3 Play for a few minutes and then get your child's attention by saying, “In two minutes, I'm going to wash my hands, go potty, etc.
- 4 Continue with activity for a minute or so and then say, “In one minute, I'm going to go _____.”
- 5 Continue with activity for another minute or so and then say, “I'm going to go _____. Be right back.”
- 6 The adult staying with your child will say, “Bye...see you soon” (or something similar).
- 7 You will get up and walk around the corner or walk to a different room. Count to 5 or 10 and then come right back.
- 8 Say, “Hi, I'm back” and continue activity with your child.
- 9 Practice several times a day with your child if possible. Use the same phrases and the same steps. You can vary the reason you have to leave.
- 10 Once your child is ok with you being gone for 5 seconds, 10 seconds, etc. start practicing longer amounts of time (a couple of minutes or so). You can also practice leaving the house (check the mail, get something out of your car, etc.).



Once your child is doing fairly well with shorter separations:

- Practice with separating from different people in your home (go through the same process)
- Switch up the length of the practice separations -- some are really short and some are longer
- Practice short separations in other familiar places (grandparent's home, play group, library, etc).

Continue to have an extra person to stay with your child as long as needed (especially in different locations).

Separation Strategies

Our kids need to practice safe, predictable separations to feel more comfortable and stay regulated during longer ones. We don't get good at things we don't practice -- the same goes for our kids.

Here are some additional ways you can help your child learn how to separate more easily from you.

Let Them See You Leave

It's so tempting to sneak out when they aren't looking but this can lead to more clinginess and anxiousness.

Good-bye Routine

Create a predictable good-bye routine. The sameness is reassuring to young children. Keep it short and simple. Do this routine each time.

Play It Out (older)

Act out good-bye routine with stuffed animals or dolls. You can be the "child" who gets dropped off and cry and be sad and your child can be the "parent" and help calm your sad doll or animal.

Communicate

Talk with your child's school, daycare, etc early and often about accommodations or strategies to help with separating.

Leave Quickly

Tell your child bye and that you'll be back. Give a quick hug and kiss and get out.

Prepare Ahead of Time

A picture book or schedule is very helpful. Take a picture of each step of what will happen (car, school building, classroom, back to car, home). Review and discuss with your child.

Play It Out (younger)

You can play games such as peek-a-boo, let's find mom, hide and seek with a toy/stuffed animal, etc.



When You Need More Help...

For most families, practicing separations and making them predictable is enough. Your child may not be happy about you leaving, but they are able to separate from you with some sadness but they're ok within a few minutes.

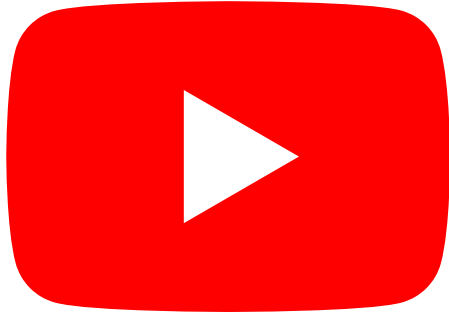
However, you may want to seek professional help if any of the following are occurring:

- Despite your best efforts, your child is still experiencing anxiety.
- Your child is experiencing sudden and intense behavior and/or mood changes.
- Your child won't leave you (even at home) and won't go with other familiar adults and siblings.
- Your child has experienced previous traumatic experiences.
- Your child is a foster child.
- The level of stress is more than you and/or your child can handle (it's heavily impacting your daily life).

If any of these are the case for you and your family, please contact your child's pediatrician. They may give you additional strategies or provide you with a referral to a counselor or therapist who can assist your family. You can also contact your insurance provider to see which child counselors/therapists accept your insurance.

You can also find resources through Utah211.org.





Parent Classes are now on YouTube!

ANNOUNCEMENT!

You can find the monthly classes on YouTube and watch them when it's convenient for you. You can also find previously recorded topics.

Scan the QR code or paste the link into your browser:

[Using Visual Supports to Help with Good-byes](#)



[5 Strategies to Help with Separating from Parents](#)

