



Wee Learn



Wee Explorers (18 months - 3 years): Separation Anxiety: Ways to Ease Your Child's Fears (so you can both stop crying!)

If your baby doesn't even whimper when you drop him/her off at daycare or Grandma's, enjoy it while it lasts. One fine day, he or she may show their displeasure at being left behind, even if you're just headed to the bathroom. Your goal: To get your cutie comfortable at the thought of saying goodbye. And, yes, it can be done!

1. EXPECT IT SOONER RATHER THAN LATER.

Thought you could escape tearful goodbyes until toddlerhood? Not a chance. Separation anxiety can start anywhere from 7 to 9 months. That's the age your baby realizes you are the go-to person for all good things, like comfort, love, and security.

2. SEE THE SILVER LINING.

At this age separation anxiety is normal, a healthy sign that your baby's development is right on cue. Here's another reason to pat yourself on the back: All those months you spent soothing your colicky baby or dragging yourself out of bed for another 2 a.m. feeding have taught your baby she can count on you.

3. DON'T CONFUSE STRANGER AND SEPARATION ANXIETY.

They may travel together, but stranger anxiety and separation anxiety are two different things. Stranger anxiety is when your baby's wary of unfamiliar faces—even your mom's. If that person gets close, your little one will fuss or fall apart, even if he's in your arms, so tell people to take it slow.

4. DON'T BLAME YOUR SITUATION.

Kids who've gone to daycare since day one are just as likely to experience separation anxiety as the child with a stay-at-home parent, say experts. Separation anxiety has more to do with your child's attachment to you; you really can't head it off by leaving her as a newborn—or leaving her in the care of others as often as you can.

5. IT'S ALL ABOUT PERSONALITY.

What makes one child fall apart when his mom says goodbye, and another suck his thumb? Temperament. While the classic sign is the baby who cries and reaches out to you, there are subtler ones too: Your baby might get stiff as a board or very limp and quiet. None of these ways of reacting mean anything. The toddler who waves bye-bye and goes off to play is just as bonded to his parents as the tot who's melting down in the corner.

6. KEEP YOUR GOODBYES UPBEAT.

Your mission when you leave: To reassure your little one that going away (and returning) are perfectly normal experiences. That's why you want to put on a happy, confident face when you say bye-bye. Saying, "I'll be back soon!" or "You're going to have so much fun at Nana's!" may sound forced (especially if you're a little sad at separating, too) but they help your child feel safer.

7. DON'T BE A BASKET CASE.

Nothing spooks a child more than your anxiety. Getting tearful or asking your little one if they are going to be okay will just make him think something bad is going to happen while you're gone. Another no-no: Sweet-talking your child to stay with the promise of a reward, that won't soothe them. If you've been falling apart up until now, don't worry: Kids are resilient, just make a vow to start over tomorrow morning.

8. HELP THEM COPE FROM THE GET-GO.

Besides responding to their needs, there are a few ways you can help your baby cope with uncomfortable feelings. Be predictable and reliable. Sticking to a flexible routine helps your child deal with frustration because she knows what to expect—especially around cranky times of day like feedings, naps, and bedtime.

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9. TRY SOME TRIAL RUNS.

If your little clinger can't stand the thought of you going to the bathroom without her, practice mini separations. Play games like peekaboo or, especially, hide and seek. Go into another room, pop back in, and praise him/her for not falling apart. Then gradually increase the time between your exits and entrances. To sweeten the deal, pull out a special toy that she gets to play with while you're in the bathroom.

10. FOCUS ON FUN.

Along with those upbeat goodbyes, talk about the fun things your child will do while you're away, that shifts the emphasis away from the fearful present to the much more entertaining future that awaits them when you walk out the door. You can also get her mind off the goodbyes by asking her to paint you a picture or set up the train set to play with when you get back.

11. READ ALL ABOUT IT.

Even babies like seeing other tots in familiar situations. That's why books can ease so many difficult transitions, from getting dressed to giving up the pacifier to saying goodbye.

12. ALWAYS COME BACK.

Never, ever sneak out, the last thing you want to do is give your child a reason not to trust you. If they can't count on you, who will they rely on? So, don't leave while he/she is asleep or pretend you're going to a movie when you're leaving her for the weekend.

13. REMEMBER THAT IT'S JUST A PHASE.

Whether those tearful tantrums last weeks or months, they will go away, but like everything else in childhood, expect the unexpected. A baby who's never had separation anxiety can develop it in preschool. A toddler may go through a bad patch forever, then surprise you by running off without a backward glance. Whatever you must go through, just remember this, you've taught your kid to handle his/her emotions and fears—and that will get him through a lot.

Source: <https://on.today.com/2waGx6v>

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