



What To Do When It's Not Anxiety..

- When your child is showing extreme anxiety symptoms when saying goodbye to you but is fine once he/she is in the classroom it may not be anxiety. Instead, your child could be using these behaviors to gain attention or rewards from you.
- It can be hard to tell and at times anxiety and behavior coexist, however, communicating with the teacher and/or school counselor can help you to know how your child does once you leave.
- When it's more of a behavioral issue, you want to approach it in a more behavioral way. For example, setting up a behavior chart with your child (see my brochure on home behavior charts for more info) and being more stern and less consoling.
- Make sure that you stick to the behavior plan you already set up with your child. When you get to school, he/she may start to ask you for new things (such as coming to eat lunch or going somewhere special after school). Do not agree to this unless this was already the plan, otherwise you are reinforcing their negative behavior.

Resources

- <http://www.sesamestreet.org/parents/topics/stress/stress03>
 - *a great article discussing other ways to help your child when dealing with stress surrounding separation from a caregiver*
- <http://www.scholastic.com/parents/resources/article/social-emotional-skills/5-parent-tested-ways-to-ease-separation-anxiety>
 - *a short article with tips from parents of how they best deal with difficult morning transitions*
- <http://www.loveandlogic.com/t-Start-School-With-a-Smile.aspx>
 - *an article discussing starting school well from the parenting technique Love and Logic*

Helpful Books To Read Together

The Kissing Hand by Audrey Penn

Llama, Llama, Misses Mama by Anna Dewdney

I Love You All Day Long by Francesca Rusackas

Mommy In My Pocket by Carol Hunt Senderak

Mama, Don't Go! by Rosemary Wells

Oh My Baby, Little One by Kathi Appelt

BUT I DON'T WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL!!!

How To Support A Child With Separation Anxiety



Information on helping your child transition successfully to school.

By: Tami Lewis, CBES K-3 School Counselor

tami.lewis@knoxschools.org

FAQS

What is separation anxiety?

- Separation anxiety is worry or fear over leaving a loved one and is a common occurrence in young children. Often the child simply needs some help feeling secure in a new environment.

What are some signs and symptoms of separation anxiety?

- Clinginess, not wanting to leave parent/go to school, trouble sleeping, crying, complaints of stomachaches or headaches that disappear once the child is at home

Red flags...

- Some degree of anxiety in a new setting is normal, however, if your child is displaying these behaviors in an extreme manner (crying to the point of getting sick, waking up in the middle of the night with fear over being away from you, etc) or is experiencing these behaviors for several months it may be a more serious condition called separation anxiety disorder.
- In this case, it may be good to talk to your pediatrician about what to do next.

However..

- A mild degree of separation anxiety actually shows a healthy attachment to the caregiver and this is not a bad thing!

So What's A Parent To Do?

Strategies to help you and your child cope

1. Routine Get your child's school things ready the night before and go over the morning routine with them. Try to keep it the same as much as possible and make sure to get up early enough so you aren't rushed. The less stress at home, the better chance for a happier drop off.
2. Good-bye Ritual Try coming up with a short and sweet goodbye ritual for you and your child to do each morning. Let him help come up with it but don't let him change it the morning of. One more hug may not seem like a big deal but it can quickly turn into a power struggle. Also, sneaking away without saying goodbye may further increase her anxiety over you leaving her.
3. Stay Positive If your child sees you looking upset or anxious it will only amplify their own feelings of fear. Even if you are sad, be positive and smile. This helps reassure them that school is not a scary place and they have no reason to be worried.
4. Sunny Thoughts Practice saying positive affirmations to your child such as, Even though I have to leave you I will see you again this afternoon!



More Strategies

- Role-Play For some children it can help to actually practice what you will do in the morning beforehand. Get in and out of the car, walk them up to the house, and do your goodbye ritual. If you are able to it might even be good to practice it at the school so they are familiar with the environment.
- Make a Change For some children, it may be easier for them to say goodbye to you at home (riding the bus) or in the car rider line. Consider changing the way you take your child to school.
- Get Some Help! Talk to your child's teacher or school counselor for additional support at school.
- Whatever you do....DON'T TAKE THEM HOME!!!! Unless they are truly ill (fever or vomiting), taking them home will only make it worse. This teaches your child that school is a scary place and it reinforces their negative behavior. Tell them first thing in the morning that you will be leaving for school at 7:00, they can cry if they want to and you will be there to pick them up at 3 pm. Then don't talk about it any more!