

What parents can do to help children who have separation anxiety



The Problem. The child thinks that when you are out of sight, you are not coming back. S/he can have tantrums, be fearful, won't let you go.

The solution. The child needs to learn that goodbyes are temporary. That you will be back. You need to build your child's confidence that you can be relied on and will return. By establishing a consistent pattern of attentive goodbyes and happy reunions, you can build your child's confidence.

1. **Don't sneak off when the child isn't looking.** This will make them even more anxious. Be calm and consistent, say and do the same thing every time - say a quick loving goodbye and remind them that you will see them later and explain how long it will be using concepts that kids understand (such as saying 'after lunch' or 'when all the other parents come').
2. **Follow through on promises.** Make sure that you return when you promised, this is critical. When you are leaving, leave, don't come back. Be true to your word, that way they learn that they can trust you.
3. **Talk about the future.** Discuss what you are going to do together later, tomorrow, this afternoon, next week (if the child is old enough to understand). Make sure that you actually do the things that you talk about, so talk about 'in the morning when we have breakfast', or 'when you have your tea, tonight we will...'. Build a picture in the child's mind.
4. **Your child will be more susceptible to separation anxiety if they are tired or hungry.** So make sure that you have good routines about eating and sleeping so that they do not have to go away from you when they are tired or hungry.
5. **Stay in control of your emotions.** If you get upset, your child will too, they will think that something is wrong. Stay upbeat and enthusiastic; show that leaving is normal and just part of coming back.
6. **Let your child have a comfort item.** A toy or blanket.
7. **Practice goodbyes.** Do it at home when you leave the room, have fun with it, say, 'bye then, I'll be back in a minute'. Make it normal to leave and return, let them get used to it and learn that goodbyes are only temporary.
8. **Remember that this is only temporary.** It might be hard now, but it will pass as your child's confidence builds.