

Transitioning Back to School

Dealing with Separation Anxiety

Separation anxiety in children is both common and normal. It's children's response to the fear of being away from their parents or carers. It can be triggered by stress or changes in the environment such as going back to school after a period of being at home with parents and carers.



Some symptoms parents might notice include:

- Difficulty saying goodbye to parents
- Physical tantrums when faced with separation
- Fear that something bad will happen to a family member during separation
- An overwhelming need to know where parents are, and be in touch with them by phone or texting
- Shadowing one parent constantly around the house
- Vivid nightmares about family tragedy
- Physical symptoms in anticipation of separation, like headaches, tummy aches or feeling sick.

Tips to Help Ease Separation Anxiety

- Create quick goodbye rituals – say goodbye to your child briefly, don't linger or drag the goodbye out.
- Consistency is key – try to drop off at the same time each day with the same ritual as this routine will help ease your child's anxiety and build their independence.
- Let your child know when you are leaving and when you will be coming back. Explain to your child in age appropriate terms when you'll be back as this builds your child's trust.
- When you're leaving try and keep a relaxed, confident and happy look on your face as if your child sees that you're anxious, worried or upset this will increase their anxiety levels.



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Steps to Help Ease Children's Fears

Throughout the Coronavirus pandemic things have been changing quite quickly and there has been heightened levels of anxiety in the community for a variety of reasons. With children going back to school they may be fearful about getting sick, separating from parents and carers or worried that other people will get sick. So here are some tips that will help ease their fears.



1. Ask what they are worried about

Talk to your children in age appropriate ways and ask them what they are worried about or scared of, that way you can help ease their fears and anxiety. Once you know exactly what it is that they are worried about you can address those fears. We need to let their questions, worries and behaviour guide the conversation.

2. Explain facts in age appropriate ways

If they are worried about getting sick, or someone they love getting sick we need to give them enough age appropriate information, so they know what's going on, but not overwhelm them with information overload. Keep it simple for younger children and provide more detailed information for older kids – 81% of people who get Coronavirus get over it and do not become really sick and kids aren't getting sick as much. Let their fears guide the conversation because that way you'll know what they need to understand to feel safe.

3. Give them a sense of control and power

Children feel empowered when they know what to do to keep themselves safe so remind them that they can keep themselves safe by doing some very important hygiene practices:

- Coughing and sneezing into their crooked elbow
- blowing their nose into a tissue then throwing that tissue away and
- washing their hands, washing their hands thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (the length of two happy birthday verses) after they come have been playing, before they eat, after blowing their nose, coughing sneezing or using the bathroom
- not touching their face with their hands
- bumping elbows or fist bumping
- social distancing

These strategies make them part of the solution and empower them to take action which helps reduce their fear.

