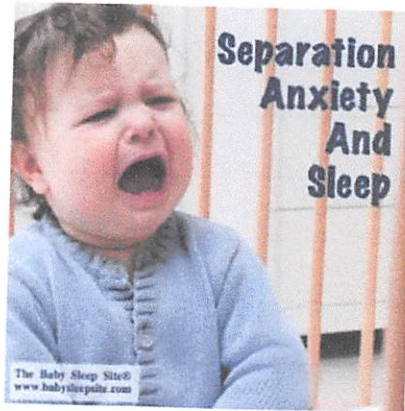


How To Handle Your Baby or Toddler's Separation Anxiety and Sleep

by Emily DeJeu in Sleep Training – 96 Comments
Last Updated: September 28, 2019



I've always thought the term "separation anxiety" wasn't an adequate one. It sounds kind of clinical and dull, in my opinion. But those of us whose babies and toddlers have experienced separation anxiety (and I'm guessing that's almost all of us) know that the separation anxiety is *anything* but dull!

So maybe a term like "separation red-faced-screaming-panic-attack" would be more appropriate? Just throwing it out there. 😊

At any rate, separation anxiety is the topic of today's article. **Specifically, we'll look at why and when separation anxiety occurs, how it affects sleep, and what you can do to cope with it.**

Don't Worry, Separation Anxiety Is Normal. (In Fact, It's a Good Sign!)

It might not seem normal for your baby or toddler to cling to your legs, spider-monkey style, and scream until they turn purple, but don't worry – it's very normal indeed!

In the first few months of your baby's life, he's really not able to distinguish between adults; one caregiver looks and feels much like another. That's why most newborns and young infants are content to be passed around between adults. Beginning around 7 or 8 months, however, your baby will start being able to tell one adult from another; she'll also start to become more attached to mom and dad. In this way, separation anxiety is actually a good sign; it indicates that a baby is forming strong, healthy attachments to her parents.

What's more, at this age, your baby's starting to develop the concept of object permanence. In the early months of life, babies don't understand object permanence; once an object (or a person) disappears from their line of sight, it's simply gone, in their minds. (This is why peek-a-boo tends to be endlessly fascinating for young babies – from their perspective, you're performing the most incredible magic trick imaginable!) But around 7 or 8 months, babies begin to understand that objects and people they can't

Are y
advik

Hi, I'm
help y
thrive.
soluti

Yes

Abc

Nicole
found
sleep
The B
Since
2008,
sleep
40,000
has al
the Int
Sleep
Millio
Site e
are he
sleep
baby's
style.

See

Parent

4 mc
impr

5 mc
not e

8 mc

8 mc
mon

Not
even

2 1/
nigh

Rece

Can
Sleep
Revi

5 Tip
Anvy

Since, separation anxiety is actually a positive sign it lets parents know that their baby understands object permanence.

Nicole's Note:

"As usual, don't be alarmed if your baby doesn't follow the books on this one. My sons were NEVER babies who could be passed around the party! Ever. They didn't even really go to grandma and grandpa. Not even when they were a couple weeks old! I don't know why. I think, somehow, they DID distinguish us from other adults. Somehow. Even our nanny, who was there on day one with our second born, he would not go to her until a week or two later and we had to 'work' at it. He went to me and his Dad and that was it. He was literally born that way. And, he was the 'easier' of the two. Ha! They have both been shy with strangers from the beginning, but now that they are older, they are soooo different! So, if your baby has always seemed to only want you, foster the security in the relationship and the confidence will come."

What Is Separation Anxiety, and Why Does It Happen?

Separation anxiety starts in the infant stage – somewhere between 6-10 months, for most babies. You may start to notice that your baby clings to you and cries before you leave her with a babysitter, or at naptime and/or bedtime. Often, separation anxiety appears out of the blue – your baby is fine one day and is a clinging, sobbing, terrified mess the next. This is understandably unnerving for a lot of parents!

Separation anxiety rears its head most often when parents are transitioning their babies into daycare, or into the babysitter's care. But separation anxiety also affects sleep. It can do real damage to a [baby's nap schedule](#), and it can cause even the best sleeper to start [waking frequently at night](#). And this makes sense; a baby who's deep in the throes of separation anxiety certainly won't want to be left alone to nap or to sleep all night. In fact, separation anxiety can be one of the major factors involved in the [8/9/10 month sleep regression](#).

A Look At Your Toddler's Separation Anxiety, and How It Affects Sleep

It's normal for your little one's separation anxiety to wax and wanes during his toddler years; it may be better at some points and worse at others. (Of course, if your child's separation anxiety hangs around full-force throughout toddlerhood, that's normal, too!) Many parents find that separation anxiety resurfaces in a big way around 18 months (co-inciding with the [18 month sleep regression](#)) and again around age 2 (again, co-inciding with the [2 year sleep regression](#)).

Just as it did in infancy, separation anxiety can really wreck your toddler's sleep. And it may be even harder to deal with the naptime and bedtime drama this time around, since your toddler's separation anxiety will often manifest as full-blown temper tantrums. Naps may become royal battles. And you might find that your [toddler starts fiercely resisting bedtime or crying for you repeatedly during the night](#).

Some Separation Anxiety Do's and Don'ts: How To Handle Your Baby or Toddler's Naptime and Nighttime Separation Anxiety

Yes, separation anxiety's perfectly normal – and from a developmental standpoint, it's actually a good sign! But that's hardly comforting when you're facing your third week of sleepless nights and microscopic naps, right?

6 Tips
the S

Are I
Preg

Popu

Sle
an

10 T

Can

Wha

4-Mc

8-10

18-M

5 Th
Old's

Fer
Sci

New

New

2-Mc

3-Mc

4-Mc

5-Mc

6-Mc

7-Mc

8-Mc

9-Mc

10-M

11-M

Todr

Ba

New
e-Bo

2-3 M

The
Baby

Ultin

Are you tired of one-size-fits-all advice? Yes! I need a *personalized* sleep solution.

Separation anxiety and make it easier to handle for everyone.

- **DO develop a good bedtime routine.** If you haven't already, work to create a soothing bedtime routine for your baby or toddler. This will help her relax before bed; it will also provide the kind of consistency and predictability that she needs to feel safe.
- **DO keep things light.** The last thing a parent wants to do is make their child's separation anxiety worse. But many parents do just that without realizing it. When you put on a worried and anxious face, or when you cry along with your child, you simply reaffirm to your little one that bedtime is, in fact, terrifying, and that he has every reason to be afraid. Instead, work to keep things light and calm at bedtime and nap time. If you seem relaxed and confident, it'll help your baby or toddler feel that way, too.
- **DON'T try to sneak away.** Parents, this is a big no-no. Yes, in the moment, it seems easier to simply wait until your baby or toddler is drowsy or distracted and then slip out the door. But in the long run, it just makes things worse. It adds to your child's fear and uncertainty because now, he's learned that if he so much as looks the other way, you might literally vanish. Instead, say good-bye (lovingly and firmly) and then let your child see you walk out the door.
- **DO comfort your child when she needs it, but DON'T create new (bad) habits.** If your baby or toddler is wailing at naptime, or wakes in the middle of the night sobbing and screaming, feel free to comfort her. This is reassuring for your little one; it lets her know that you're nearby. And it's reassuring for you, too! However, keep these interactions relatively short and boring. This is *not* the time to read books, or to sing songs, or to play games. What's more, make sure that when your comforting is done, you leave. Remember, you don't want to create bad habits during this phase, so now isn't the time to start sleeping on your child's floor, or sitting in a rocker next to her bed.

For more information about separation anxiety, and to learn how it's different from the more serious Separation Anxiety Disorder, see [Dr. Kaylene Henderson's excellent post on the topic](#) over at her website, [Little Children Big Dreams](#).

Separation Anxiety Ruining Your Baby or Toddler's Sleep? We Can Help!

Separation anxiety can do a number on your baby or toddler's sleep. Fortunately, we can help! Our consultants at The Baby Sleep Site® specialize in creating Personalized Sleep Plans™ that are customized to your own parenting philosophy and your child's temperament, and that will NEVER make you feel guilty or pressured. Even better, once you have your Personalized Sleep Plan™, your consultant will walk you through each step of implementing it at home.

[Browse our list of consultation package options here.](#)

Once you make your choice and purchase, you will immediately receive an e-mail with your Helpdesk login information. You'll be able to log in and get started right away!

Want more information about how personalized help works? [Check out our FAQ page here](#), and get answers. You can also [take a tour of the Helpdesk](#).

How has separation anxiety affected your child's sleep? Share your tips and stories with us!

The Baby Sleep Site® is a participant in the Amazon Services LLC Associates Program and other product affiliate programs. If you click on a product link and make a purchase, The Baby Sleep Site® may (but not always) receive a small commission from the company selling the product, but will not affect your purchase price. We only recommend products that we believe are quality products and are good for our readers.

Ho

How
Sche

How
Sleep

How

How

How
Baby

Na

Baby
Long

7 Co

10 M
Fact

Baby
Why

Ch

Won

Bedt

Baby

Baby
See I

Baby
Oun

Work – Guaranteed!

If you are tired of wading through stacks of [baby sleep](#) books that just aren't working, if you are beyond exhausted and just can't solve your child's sleep problems on your own...than personalized sleep consulting is for you. We have been around since 2008 and invite you to **tap into 10+ years of experience**. Our team of expert consultants will create a Personalized Sleep Plan® just for your family and then support you through every step of implementing your plan. We encourage you to consider our personalized, one-on-one [baby and toddler sleep consultation packages](#) if you want to see real, meaningful results now. Your consultation package also includes ample follow-up help, designed to help you troubleshoot problems and tweak your plan as needed.

For those persistent nighttime struggles, check out [The 3 Step System to Help Your Baby Sleep](#). Using the same unique approach and practical tools for success, this e-book helps you and your baby sleep through the night.

If you're looking for ways to get your baby or toddler into a healthy sleeping routine during the day, I encourage you to explore [Mastering Naps and Schedules](#), a comprehensive guide to napping routines, nap transitions, and all the other important "how-tos" of good baby sleep. With over 45 sample sleep schedules and planning worksheets, [Mastering Naps and Schedules](#) is a hands-on tool ideal for any parenting style.

For those persistent toddler sleep struggles, check out [The 5 Step System to Help Your Toddler Sleep](#). Using the same unique approach and practical tools for success, this e-book helps you and your toddler sleep through the night and enjoy a better daytime schedule.

Or, join our [Members Area](#) packed with exclusive content and resources: e-Books, assessments, detailed case studies, expert advice, peer support, and more. It actually costs less to join than buying products separately! As a member, you'll also enjoy a weekly chat with an expert sleep consultant. And the best part - **members receive 20% off all sleep consultation services!**

Related Posts

[When Do Babies Sleep Through the Night?](#)

[Controlled Crying – 5 Reasons Why This Could Be The Best Coaching Method For Your Child](#)

[How To Handle Teething and Sleep](#)

In over 10 years, we have over 10,000 comments on our blog.

We love hearing from you and encourage conversation amongst peers! Please feel free to add to the discussion! For help with your specific sleep problems, please learn more about our [DIY resources](#) or our [sleep consultation services](#). Or, consider [emailing us](#) for a fast and helpful response!