



An Age-By-Age Guide To Coping With Separation Anxiety

Separation Anxiety is Normal For Babies and Small Children

In the first two to three months, most babies are comfortable with meeting and being around people other than their parents — such as other caregivers or visitors who come by occasionally — as long as they approach gently.

3 months of age

By three months of age, your baby's senses (vision, hearing, smell and touch) develop to the point at which he knows the difference between his parents/primary caregivers and other people. Your baby knows what you look like, your tone of voice and how you touch and hold him, and he associates you with the pleasure of being comforted or fed. Your baby may think of a new person as unfamiliar, which can make him feel unsafe.

3 and 6 months of age

This is why many babies between three and six months of age 'make strange' when they are spoken to or picked up by a person they don't recognize.

Some babies react to a new person more strongly than others. This depends on how sensitive they are.

It also makes a difference whether a baby was exposed only to his parents

in his first months of life or whether he has interacted with other people.

6 months of age

At around six months of age, most babies have learned to better adjust to new people, so there isn't as much anxiety towards strangers. By this age, babies have formed a strong mental picture of their parents. This helps them feel comfortable and safe. It also helps a baby be able to be comforted by other caregivers, and to cope when parents are not around for small periods of time.

12 and 24 months

Between 12 and 24 months, children start to explore on their own, away from their parents. At first, they do this for short periods of time, without actually losing sight of their parent(s).

Parents are a small child's anchor to security. When a child explores farther away from his parents and realizes his parents are out of sight, he may become afraid and cry. This may continue even after he is reunited with a parent.

2 and 4 years

Between two and four years, children become less sensitive about being separated from their parents. A child at this age can venture farther away from their parents without getting upset.

A child's level of comfort depends on how adventurous or how sensitive he is. It also depends on the child's past experiences and whether his parents' general parenting style is calm or anxious.

Whether or not a child is separated from a parent in a familiar place also makes a difference.

The older a child is, the less separation anxiety he has.

In this age group, some children may experience stronger separation anxiety when they start going to a daycare or nursery school. This may also happen if there are changes in the family, such as a move to another house. It takes some time for children at this age to adapt to a new situation, especially when unfamiliar adults are in charge, when they meet many other children, or when there are large, noisy surroundings they are not accustomed to.

Separation anxiety may happen at bedtime for some sensitive children. These children may be afraid of the dark, have crying spells, want a parent beside them when they sleep in their own beds, or want to get into their

parents bed during the night.

Some children of school age or younger worry about where their parents are, about why a parent may be late to arrive home, or about what could happen to parents when they are away. This is another form of separation anxiety.

Managing Separation Anxiety

You may not be able to change your child's natural sensitivity about being separated from you, but you can try to help him feel less anxious.

1. Try to arrive at daycare or return home when your child expects you to. This helps him to feel secure.
2. It's important not to overprotect your child. But it's also important to keep your child away from too many situations that are more likely to cause anxiety.
3. Try to prevent stress for your child when you can. For example, try not to move to a new home in the middle of a school year, change babysitters often, or allow your child to watch television that could scare him. (Try not to let your child watch television for long periods of time.)
4. It's so important for you and your child to be close. Make sure you also give your child time away from you, however, so that he can start to learn how to be independent.
5. Try not to show anxiety around your child. If you worry too much or overprotect your child, he may start to think that there is something he should worry about. Then he will be anxious, too.
6. Let your child venture and experiment so that he learns that it is okay to try new things and to take small risks.
7. Show your child that you know when he feels anxious, and reassure him. Try not to react with anxiety yourself. The best way to help your child feel reassured is to react in a calm, realistic way.
8. Your child's pediatrician can offer suggestions if you have concerns about your child's separation anxiety.

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