



Separation Anxiety

What is happening?

It is normal for some young children to be sad or angry when they are separated from their parents.



This is called separation anxiety. It usually begins at about 6 months of age and can last until 5 years old or longer.

Some children may cry, hold on to their parent, scream, or hide when their parent leaves. Other children have an easier time separating. The way a child acts depends on how well the parent has prepared each of them for separation. It also depends on the child's age, stage of development, past experiences and personality.

Separations give children the chance to learn that they can cope with other caregivers and family members.

Why is it happening?

When parents leave, children may worry about whether parents will return and who will take care of them.

With experience, children begin to realize that when parents leave they will come back.

Remember – separating from your child may be as hard for you as it is for your child.

What can you do?

How to prepare for separations

- Play games showing your baby that things go away but come back again. For example, play peek-a-boo.
- Read stories where a small person or animal goes away from home but everything is okay.
- Practice a situation before it occurs. For example, going to the babysitter.
- Try not to have too many new things happen at one time. For example, toilet training and a new play group.

When you leave your child

Try to be relaxed about separations. This will help your child to relax.

It may be helpful to start separations in your baby's first year. A baby-sitter, family member or friend may watch your child for short times. Your child will learn that you will come back. Take time to get comfortable and confident with the person who will be with your child.

When you leave your child, it is important to say good-bye. If you sneak away your child may be more upset and trust you less. Say "good-bye" and then leave.

Tell your child when you will be back. Use words that your child will understand and make sure you return at that time. For example, say "I'll be back after lunch."

Talk to your children about their feelings but say you know they will be okay.

Tell your caregiver about your child's eating/sleeping habits and favourite activities.

Your child's reaction

Your child may be angry after the first long separation but will soon welcome you back.

Your child may separate easily at first and then later have a hard time. For example, when a new baby is born or a family member is ill.

Tips for starting preschool or daycare

Try to go to the centre with your child and meet the staff before your child is to attend. Talk to your child about the new routine and repeat the caregivers' names often. Be positive and help your child look forward to the experience.

Allow extra time in the morning when starting a new daycare or preschool.

Show an interest in what your child does at preschool/daycare. For example, display artwork at home.

When you first leave your child with another caregiver – try not to go until the caregiver can pay extra attention to your child.

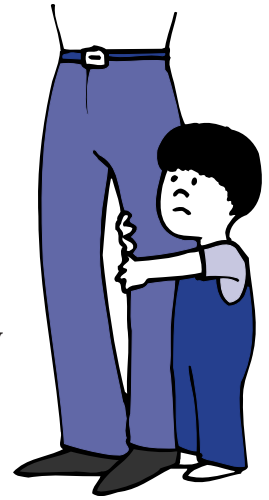
Let your child carry something that is comforting, for example, a favorite toy, blanket or photo of a parent.

The staff at the centre could help make a tape of you talking to your child in your home language to play while you are gone.

You may need to stay in the classroom at first. Help your child to become more independent by taking part less and less in the classroom activities. Also, each day, spend less time in the centre. This is called 'gradual entry'.

You may wish to invite a friend from the centre to play at your house. A close friend can help your child feel more comfortable.

It may help to talk to other parents of young children or child care centre staff for support and ideas. A good place to meet other parents of young children are Health Centre parent groups, Family Places, Neighbourhood Houses and Community Centres.



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**Other information on parenting are available
at your local Community Health Office/Centre
or online at <http://vch.eduhealth.ca>**

For more information contact:

Public Health Nurse at Vancouver Coastal Health..... www.vch.ca
Anxiety BC..... www.anxietybc.com
Healthy Families BC www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca
VCH Parenting Website <http://parenting.vch.ca/>

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