

# SCHOOL SEPARATION ANXIETY

It's normal for children to have some trouble with the school transition. It's normal for them to want to spend time with you: you're who they know and trust.

It hurts to see them sad, and nothing makes you feel worse as a parent than walking away from your child when he or she is in tears. Your instinct is to fix it quickly and comfort them. However, if you focus on a plan to help them get stronger and more resilient, as opposed to "fixing" their fear, you'll both feel better in the long run.

You're looking for a general improvement over time – there may be days where things back-slide after they've been going well for a while, which is also normal. But the one reliable indicator you can look out for is what your child is like fifteen minutes after you've left the building. Children are highly adaptable and the majority of them will be having fun, playing with friends and enjoying school, even if they struggle at the beginning of the day.

## TOP TIPS

- Don't introduce the idea of worry
- Create a goodbye routine and stick to it
- Don't linger
- Don't sneak out without them looking
- Talk about their emotions with them
- Remind them you will be there at the end of the day

## HOW TO HELP REDUCE SEPARATION ANXIETY AT SCHOOL

- Help them feel comfortable with their emotions. Some level of separation anxiety is very normal. Reassure them it's natural but they will be safe and happy and that you'll return for them at the end of the day. Encourage them into school without belittling their fears. Do your best to appear calm, show your child that everything is under control. Use calming language and logically talk through what is happening. Tell them you understand they are worried and that's okay, but you will be there when school ends.
- Don't introduce the idea of worry or fear if they're not showing any signs of those emotions. Maybe they're just fine marching into the school. If they are, try not to say things like "are you nervous about your first day?" or "you're so brave to go off on your own!" If they didn't think they should be nervous before, they may start wondering about the reasons they should be
- Create a goodbye routine and stick to it. Whatever routine you decide on, the most important thing is to leave when it's done, and not get baited into staying longer, or doing the routine again, or giving one last hug. Set the expectation that goodbye means goodbye ... until you see them after school. Making your goodbye quick

## USEFUL WEBSITES

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/school-anxiety-and-refusal/>

<https://www.parentkind.org.uk/for-parents/health-and-wellbeing/school-anxiety-and-refusal>

<https://find-information-for-adults-children-families.southglos.gov.uk/kb5/southglos/directory/advice.page?id=F7ycD7DJFrY>

<https://www.southwestyorkshire.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Separation-Anxiety-Parents-Guide.pdf>

<https://parents.actionforchildren.org.uk/school-life/school-behaviour-wellbeing/coping-school-refusal>

## BOOKS

Books are a great way of talking to your child about their emotions. There are lots of great books around to help you introduce ideas and have conversations. Some good ones around separation anxiety are The Invisible String and The Kissing Hand. But have a look around and find one that you think would be right for your family.

and clean: a hug, a “goodbye,” and into school. Set a healthy limit for the amount of hand-holding and hugs your child can expect from you and stick to it, even when it’s hard. Don’t linger too long and drag the goodbye out. This could lead to tears that otherwise wouldn’t have happened.

- Nobody doubts the pain of walking away from your child if he or she is upset and scared. But they’re smart, and if you linger, they’ll learn quickly that their tears mean you won’t leave. Nobody is suggesting that the tears aren’t genuine; they really are upset, and that’s perfectly normal. That said, if they have an option between clinging to you, or learning their own skills of independence and resilience, they’ll likely choose you. They will quickly learn the tears will keep you there but that won’t help them in the long run.
- Don’t sneak out when they’re not looking, it might be easier in the short term, but it can lead to trust issues when your child realises you left without them knowing. You want to build long-term resilience, and not rely on short-term avoidance. Once they figure out you’ve snuck out on them, they’ll go into the next day with less trust and more fear.
- Talk to your child about if there is anything in particular that is making them anxious about coming into school. It may well be that they are adjusting to not being at home, this is practically true in the younger years or after a school holiday. However if there is another reason please come and talk to us to see what we can do to support them.