

# Separation Anxiety: 15 Ways to Ease Your Child's Fears

by Cathryn Tobin, MD, author of *The Parent's Problem Solver*

Separation anxiety is a little one's way of saying how much they *really* don't want to say good-bye. Most preschoolers and grade-schoolers experience it at some point in their early lives. Sometimes it occurs out of the blue after a change in the environment. Other times separation anxiety occurs because children are worried about life at home -- perhaps because parents are fighting or someone is sick -- and they feel a sense of uncertainty about leaving home. Most often, however, separation anxiety is purely a "missing mom" issue. Madison fussed for months on end until I had my eldest daughter drop her off. Almost immediately, the tears and tantrums disappeared. Follow these 15 strategies and you may be able to minimize the problem too.

**DO:** Keep your good-byes short and sweet. In doing so, you convey the message that you have confidence in your [child's](#) ability to cope.

**DON'T:** Hover around. Your child will sense your anxiety, and this will make it more difficult for her to calm down.

**DO:** Tuck a family picture or a loving reminder away in your child's backpack for her to look at later in the day.

**DON'T:** Sneak out. You want your child to know unequivocally that she can trust you.

**DO:** Develop loving good-bye routines. Madison and I invented a kiss-hug-nose-rub routine that we both enjoy.

**DON'T:** Bargain or bribe your child to behave. Your little one should be allowed her feelings.

**DO:** Send clear messages. Your child needs to know that you expect him to go to school no matter how much he fusses, cries or stamps his feet.

**DON'T:** Take your child home. If you do, you send the message that if your child cries enough he won't have to stay.

**DO:** Invite children from the class over, so your child can forge friendships that will make the transition easier.

**DON'T:** Get upset. By keeping an upbeat and positive attitude about your child's school, teacher and friends, you'll help your child feel safe and enjoy his time at school.

**DO:** Ask your spouse or another family member to take a turn dropping your child off, or pick up one of your child's classmates on the way to school, and your problems may disappear with lightning speed.

**DON'T:** Discuss problems with the teacher in the morning. Save conversations and

questions for the end of the day.

**DO:** Involve the teacher. You need someone on the other end who will greet your child and ease the transition.

**DON'T:** Be surprised if you solve the problem and it reoccurs after holidays and sick days.

**DO:** Believe in your child's ability to make positive changes.

Remember: Separation anxiety means that a strong and loving bond exists between you and your child.

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