

Caregiver Resource

EXPERIENCING SEPARATION ANXIETY

Separation distress in young children is natural, children want to be with their safe people who they love. Being a safe person who your child relies on is very valuable. These tips may not work for everyone or for every time, every little person is different... change them up so they work for you!

Stay calm and try to remain positive about kindergarten. Seeing your child distressed can cause you your own distress! Children pick up on how we are feeling, if we feel tense, their anxiety may also increase. Take a few deep breaths and be their calm, safe person.

Practicing leaving children with other family members or trusted friends. Initially this may be for brief periods of time to build their skills. Use gentle encouragement to support your child and highlight their achievements.

When they do start kindergarten, start the **transitioning the day before**. This can include getting the bag packed, running through the timeline for the day before and them picking out their clothes to wear. This helps the child to be prepared, and reduce stressors in the morning prior to leaving (allowing for a calmer morning).

Create a **goodbye routine** the child can use each day. This may include use the same goodbye phrase or action, identifying an activity that the child goes to first to support their transition into the room. Consistent rituals and routines are helpful for creating a sense of safety and predictability for children.

Stay positive while you **reflect and validate** children's feelings of sadness or fear when separating - "I can see that you feel really sad about leaving mum. sometimes it is really hard to say goodbye."

Consider using a **comfort item** they can bring from home. This is generally a reminder of home or an item of their caregivers that can be used to support transition - "now remember you are holding onto mum's scarf for her today."



SUPPORTING CHILDREN EXPERIENCING SEPARATION ANXIETY

Anxiety responses can make it hard for all of us to think rationally... Having a premade **Coping Plan** can help to identify strategies that may help when things are really overwhelming. This can include making **coping cards** where your child can choose what they need

Make a **soothing or activity or coping toolbox** with the child. The box can include a range of items to support the child after separation and when they feel anxiety during the session.

Read books or use stories that support your child to overcome separation anxiety. These can help show how we build resilience and normalise their feelings of worry.

Reflect on the **predictability** of your kinder routine. Consistency is super important for anxious children. Do you have a visual routine? Do you talk about the routine and any changes to the routine? Do you prepare children for transitions in a predictable way?

Use lots of positive praise about your child's achievements. This will help to build their self-esteem not only about leaving you but about how much else they can do!

Use a **social story** to create a visual narrative about how drop offs go and that parents will be back to get the child. Social stories can offer a verbal narrative for the child to use during these situations.

You may wish to use the **step ladder approach** if your child is experiencing considerable separation anxiety. This involves gradually tackling more challenging situations. This helps your child build a sense of safety and control

