

Separation Anxiety

Provided to you by:

The Family Resource Center at Community Gatepath

Almost all babies or toddlers experience separation anxiety at some time or another. As difficult as it is to leave your screaming toddler, learning to separate from a parent or other primary caregiver is an important skill for children and parents to learn.

Things Parents Should Know About Separation Anxiety

- ◆ Parents can suffer from it too! Adults may experience anxiety when separated from loved ones.
- ◆ One reason parents may be hesitant leaving their child is that they don't feel comfortable leaving their child in another's care.
- ◆ Parents may be concerned about how their child will cope without them. Parents also wonder if their child will get anything constructive out of a program if they are crying most of the time.
- ◆ Children usually quit crying in about 4 minutes after parents leave.
- ◆ Children who learn separation skills will be able to get much more out of their therapy sessions than those who still cling to mom and dad.
- ◆ Separation is a skill that needs to be built upon gradually.

How to Work On Separation with Your Child

- ◆ Start leaving your child occasionally with a babysitter by six months of age.
- ◆ Prepare your child ahead of time. Talk about where you are going, who you will see when you get there and what you will do. If you will be leaving your child in the classroom while you attend a parent support group. Show your child the room you will be in when you get into the building.
- ◆ Help your child become familiar with new places or classrooms before you leave them alone with the teachers and other children. (the staff will help you work on separation by having you leave for short periods of time and then returning).
- ◆ A slow and steady approach will help your child to a smooth transition. Take the time to sit with your child and play until they are comfortable with their surroundings.
- ◆ Always tell your child good-bye. Even though you may be tempted to sneak off to avoid your child's tantrum or crying. Don't do it! This may only make your child clingier, since the child never knows when you will disappear without notice.
- ◆ When it is time to go cheerfully and firmly tell your child a quick good-bye, "Goodbye, Mommy is going to parent group now, I'll be back at bubble time" Do not allow your goodbye to turn into a long drawn out scene. This will only make it harder on your child and on you.
- ◆ Remember separation anxiety is common in children between the ages of 8 months to 3 years of age. Children who have special needs may have an even more difficult time with it than others.