

Ways to support yourself and your child with Separation Anxiety



Anxiety/worry and distress when a child is separated from their Caregiver.

This often stems from a fear that the caregiver/parent will not return or, the child will be unsafe without them.

Maintaining child's anxiety

Behaviours

Parent giving reassurance "You will be OK". Prevents child from learning they can cope independently. Child becomes reliant on reassurance.



Alternatives

Questioning

Gently explore their worries. Allow child to problem solve, this will build their confidence and help the child feel heard.

Containment

Validate and empathise with the child's worry offering a distraction rather than trying to fix it. "I can see you are feeling worried, let's name 5 things you can see"

Avoidance

Keeping child off school
Avoiding situations fails to give the child opportunity to learn coping skills or challenge their anxiety by learning the situation is not as scary as they thought.



Facing Fears

helping the child come into school through a graded exposure approach (breaking down big fears into smaller steps)

Coming in through the office

Doing a 'job' for the teacher

Speak with the class teacher to make a plan

Safety Behaviours

Staying with child / Taking a toy from home. Child becomes reliant on the behavior and doesn't challenge their anxiety.



Behaviour experiment

Set up an 'experiment' to help the child learn they will be okay without their safety behaviour.

E.g., let's see what happens if you come into school without Mum or let's watch what happens when someone else comes in without Mum, are they ok? If so, you probably will be too!

Upstairs/downstairs brain

When your child is regulated their upstairs and downstairs brain are connected and they are ready to play learn and engage with other. When a child has become dysregulated their brain becomes disconnected and this activates the downstairs brain (flight, fight or freeze). This will make it difficult to pay attention and focus.

How you can help your child reconnect

- Keep Calm, lend your child your calm to co-regulate.
- Validate/normalise their feelings "Lots of children can feel like this too"
- Encourage them to use their upstairs brain.
- Breathing exercises
- Grounding techniques
- Relaxation
- Drawing/reading/counting

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Strategies

Discuss what your child are looking forward to at school.

Play distraction games 'I SPY' 'How many red cars will we see this morning?'

Plan exciting activities for after school/end of the day/ weekend. Going to the park, playing a board game.

Visual aids at home, timetable for the day/week ahead.

Implement wellbeing and mindfulness activities.

Stay calm

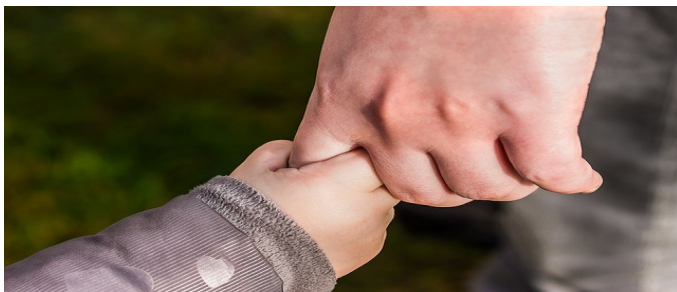
Be kind to yourself

Reflect on how you feel?

Children can be perceptive and may pick up on any anxiety or negativity you may be feeling yourself...

How can we change this?

- Positive self-talk
- Talking to others or school about your worries/concerns when your child is not present
- Plan something nice after dropping your child to school, to 'get through' the morning.
- Talk to your child about things they can look forward to, like seeing their friends every day, a lesson they enjoy or meeting their new teacher.



Ref:
The Spark Therapy Services
Dunstable Mental Health Support Team (MHST)
Bedfordshire CAMHS – East London NHS Foundation Trust

