

BABY BYTES

For families with infants and young children

Separation Anxiety

Most babies will experience separation anxiety at some point. Separation anxiety is defined as a baby's fear of being separated from the person or persons they care about the most. Separation anxiety can involve children fretting, crying, screaming, protesting, and clinging to or refusing to separate from parents.



DID YOU KNOW???

- Separation anxiety is a typical milestone for infants and a sign that their social development is changing and progressing.
- While it may be a challenging phase, it is your baby's way of saying that you are not replaceable.
- The peak period for separation anxiety is usually between the ages of 8-14 months, but it can recur sporadically at any time throughout the first few years of children's lives.
- The way children handle separation may directly reflect how their parents handle it, so your baby is likely to do much better if you appear to be doing well.



TIPS TO REDUCE THE IMPACT OF SEPARATION ANXIETY

- Try to keep your body language and voice calm and re-assuring.
- Give your child time to become comfortable when meeting new people.
- Schedule in a generous amount of time to drop your baby off with another caregiver so your good bye is not hurried.
- On the other hand, try not to linger too long, rather keep the goodbye calm and matter of fact.
- Plan ahead so you have all of your baby's things organized and in one place so you don't have to drag out the separation.
- Try to be consistent when you must leave your child. Children are re-assured by consistent routines that help them to understand and anticipate what will happen next. Talk about the plan with your child, for example "first you will go to _____'s house and then I will come back and pick you up."
- Resist the temptation to sneak out the door when your baby is not looking. Your baby needs to learn that you will leave when you say good bye but you will also return later on.
- Send a comfort object along with your child to help them settle into a new childcare arrangement.
- Children differ in their reactions to separations and strangers. Some may become easily fearful while others may hardly react at all.
- This may also be a difficult time for parents to begin to leave their children. Staying calm and matter of fact will help your child to see that everything is going to be alright.

Source: Hospital for Sick Children Toronto - June 2004

