



Starting Kindy



Tips to Help Children Cope with Separation

Children who struggle with separation anxiety can have a difficult time starting Kindy.

It is important to remember that the best way to help children reduce separation anxiety is to help them establish a solid and trusting relationship with their teacher (and assistant) so they can feel that they are in the care of a 'safe adult'.

However, for some children, this is a slow process. In the meantime, it can help to have some strategies available to help children feel connected to their parents throughout the school day. This can help scaffold them until a good enough relationship is established with the teacher. The below strategies can help.



Maintaining the connection

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What parents can do

- Draw a symbol on your hand and a matching one on your child's hand and talk about how it keeps the two of you connected. This might sound something like, "anytime you press on our special flower, it will send me a hug and I will send one right back". Visual symbols will work best and it should be personalized so that it has particular meaning for your child. This could be something like a flower, a love heart, or a superhero wrist watch, for example. The symbol can be 'powered up' in the morning with lots of hugs, kisses, and special phrases (e.g., "Daddy loves you" or "I am brave") and you can tell your child that they will last them the whole day.
- Wear matching bracelets. Be sure to talk about how the beads represent your connection to each other (e.g., "this bead stores all of our kisses, this one stores our hugs"). Ask your child for ideas on what they would like to store.
- Place a small picture of you and your child together in their lunch box or school bag.
- Spray a handkerchief with your perfume for your child to take it with them.
- Play a game throughout the day whereby you and your child share a common experience. For example, tell your child to look for things that are the colour purple (or their favourite colour) throughout the day, and tell them that you will do the same. Talk about how you can share what you saw with one another at the end of the day (and follow through with this part once you reunite or once your child is ready).



Maintaining the connection

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What teachers can do

- Have the child send text messages to Mum and Dad. This quickly establishes a connection as children love to select a few emojis and see them sent to their parents who often respond very quickly. There are some great apps (such as Seesaw) that can be used for this. It is a good idea to have a conversation with parents so they know to expect a text on days when separating has been difficult
- Encourage children to draw a picture (or make a craft) to show mum or dad at the end of the day.
- Ask parents to provide family photos to display in the classroom.
- Support the use of security objects. Security objects (such as a soft toy or blanket that the child is attached to) are not just something to cuddle, they are an important part of a child's emotional support system.

Psychologists call these transitional objects because they support the transition from dependence to independence. By providing a sense of familiarity and comfort (through touch, smell), they remind the child of the security of home and can support children through periods of separation from parents.

It is important that access to these objects is not restricted as this will heighten stress. Children are more likely to need them during transitions, in novel situations (leaving the security of the classroom), and during other times of stress. Be sure to ask parents to provide duplicates to be kept at school in case the item is lost.