



# KIDSZONE

## SEPARATION ANXIETY

### Separation Anxiety – Making Goodbyes Easier

Tearful and tantrum-filled goodbyes are a common part of a child's early years. Understanding what your child is going through and having a few coping strategies can help both of you get through it.

**How separation anxiety develops:** Between 6 months and a year, children develop a sense of object permanence and begin to learn that things and people exist even when they're out of sight. They realize that there is only mom or dad, and if they can't see you, it means you've gone away. Since they don't understand the concept of time, they do not know when or if you'll be back. If your child is at school or church, or you're in your kitchen or at the office, it's all the same to them. You've disappeared, and your child will do whatever he or she can to prevent this from happening.

**What can trigger separation anxiety?** As children grow into the more independent toddler phase, they will be even more uncertain about being separated from you. This is when separation anxiety develops and each time you leave your child, you will be faced with crying, clinging to you and resisting attention from others. The timing of separation anxiety varies widely from child to child. Some go through it between 18 – 24 months and some never experience it, whilst others only show it at times of stress such as changing schools, a new sibling, moving home, or tension at home (a major cause).

**How long does separation anxiety last?** It varies depending on your child and how you respond. Sometimes, depending on the child's temperament, it can last from infancy through the elementary school years. Children do understand the effect this behaviour has on you. If you come running into the room every time your child cries and then stay there longer or take them into church with you, your child will continue to use this tactic to avoid separation.

**Your emotions:** You might experience different emotions. It can be gratifying to think that your child is so attached to you but it is more likely that you will feel (unnecessarily) guilty. Keep in mind that your little one's unwillingness to leave you is a good sign that healthy attachments have developed between the two of you.

#### Making goodbyes easier:

These strategies can help ease you and your child through this difficult period:

- **Timing is everything:** Try not to leave when your child is likely to be tired, hungry or restless.
- **Practice being apart:** From each other and introduce new places gradually. This may mean staying in the children's church with them for your first few visits.
- **Be calm and consistent:** Create an exit ritual during which you say a loving and firm goodbye, giving your child your full attention. Stay calm and show confidence in your child and his/her surroundings. Smile! Reassure your child that you will be back using concepts which he/she will understand, e.g. "I'll be back after snack time".
- **Follow through on promises:** Be sure to come straight to Kidszone to collect your child immediately after the service ends.

**Separation anxiety isn't bad for your child:** Separation anxiety gives children a chance to develop coping skills and a little independence. Eventually your child will be able to remember and understand that you always return after you leave.



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