

RIVERBEND PLAYSCHOOL

Suggestions for Parent on Handling Separation Anxiety

(Note based on material from K. Raymond, Teacher/Consultant Observation Nurseries, Calgary)

It is entirely normal for a child to experience some fear of separating from his/her caregiver for the first time. While many children handle separation very easily (and this is normal too), others find the first several days in a new program to be rather stressful. It is no easy role being the caregiver of a child who is crying and clinging and most of us who have been in that position have wondered desperately what to do. Here are some suggestions which may ease the way for some families. There is no ONE answer which fits everyone, but these are ideas which caregivers have tried and found to be useful in many cases.

1. Try to relax. Very few children by grade 1 are still suffering from this problem, so even if nothing seems to work now, you have time on your side.
2. Approach the playschool morning with a positive attitude (even if you have to fake it) and be sure your child is aware of your attitude. With a smile on your face and a happy tone in your voice, mention that "you will be going to playschool today". This is particularly helpful in that it prepares in the senses that the child knows what to expect ahead of time and the child hears excitement in your voice, rather than dread or warning. Explain several times that "you will play with the other children and at the sand centre (or whatever your child's favorite centre is)" and, "I'll come and get you and we'll go home and have lunch, etc". It is important to

end on a familiar routine activity, giving your child the knowledge that things will get back to normal. That is encouraging to a child.

3. As you head toward playschool, do not give excessive attention to the crying or complaining, but rather indicate that you understand their concerns, then let your child hear again the encouragement and excitement in your voice.
4. Once you have decided to leave, do not delay the departure. Make it quick and encouraging with some words you've planned ahead of time, then hand the child to the teacher and GO.
5. If advised by the teacher, wait in the hallway. Wait outside and listen for signs of progress or ask the other parents entering the room to report back to you. Usually the crying is mostly for the caregiver's benefit and subsides gradually as the child becomes interested in what is happening in the room.
6. Arrange ahead of time for someone to phone you in about half an hour. Now comes decision-making time. If you are told your child is doing better, you may decide to leave things alone. He/she is probably on his/her way to making the slow adjustment most children make.

If, however, you are told that the crying has not subsided or has increased, you need to have a plan ready, which you have discussed with the teacher:

- a) Go back to the school immediately and plan to stay the rest of the morning. Many caregivers do not wish their child to undergo any unhappiness (particularly in view of

a recent hospitalization, death of a family member, etc.).
Try again next class. It may go better.

- b) Gradually extend the length of time you stay away, leaving the classroom earlier and staying away longer.

At no time is it recommended that you go in the class to see your child, leave again, return, etc. This makes you feel like a yo-yo and presents a very confusing message to your child.

Never deny your child's feelings or make him/her feel silly for missing you. Indicate that you understand how he/she feels then go on to show you have faith in his/her ability to handle this, little by little, each time.

Always greet your child at the playschool with a happy expression, indicating your pleasure at seeing him/her and comment on any sign, however small, of progress.

Additional Points to consider:

- consider leaving your sweater behind as proof of your return (or make matching bracelets, or bring a favorite stuffy)
- discuss your plan or your wishes, or even your confusion, with the teacher ahead of time so neither of you is caught in a panic of the moment

The teacher is more than willing to work with you during this process. Remember, this is a short phase in your child's life. Things will get better!