

How to Handle Separation Anxiety

Separation anxiety, or “clinging” is a very natural part of a child’s development. While clinging is not really a discipline problem, it can be just as draining on a parent/caregiver. Here are some suggestions on how to deal with a clinging child:



Remember:

1. It is normal for children to hold or cling to adults, especially when they feel afraid or insecure.
2. Children often cling when they are separated from their parents. It is important for other adults involved with the children to do all that they can to help them feel safe and loved.
3. The more hugging and holding you do, the more safe and secure the child will feel.
4. Interesting activities and children to play with can be a great distraction when a child feels clingy, but do not force a child to do something he does not want to do.
5. Different children need different amounts of hugging, holding or being near you.
6. Confer with parent/caregiver to work together to make the child feel safe and secure, both at home and at child care.
7. Do not belittle a clinging child. Just expect that some day they will no longer need to cling.
8. Remember not to take a child’s need to cling personally. You have not done anything as a parent/caregiver to cause this.

Suggestions on how to handle separation anxiety:

1. If a child is clinging because of separation anxiety, be sure to tell them where you are going if you have to go out of their sight.
2. Do not get angry if a child is always following you. Stay calm, and take time to hug or hold him and then help him to find a friend or activity to get involved with. Help the child become involved in the activity and then slowly withdraw as the child seems more secure. Remain in the child’s sight.
3. Develop trust with the child by being honest, not sneaking out the door or lying to him. Tell them that you are leaving but will be back using concrete examples.
4. Let the child move away from you when they are ready, rather than you moving away from them.
5. Try and give your child special time alone with you each day, doing what the child wants to do, not what you want to do.
6. Watch the child carefully for times when they do not cling. Think about what causes this independence and try to include these things in your day together. Help the child gain confidence and a sense of control by encouraging them to be successful at independent activities.
7. If you need to be away from the child’s play space for a few minutes, let the child come with you. If that isn’t possible, bring a toy or game to a nearby room or hall so that the child can still you.

