

Separation Anxiety: First Day of School Goodbyes

The first day of school is considered a pleasant and thrilling occasion for most children. However, some children view starting school as less enjoyable due to the anxiety of being separated from their parents. Health professionals define children's fear of being parted from their parents as separation anxiety.

Separation anxiety is experienced, to a certain degree, by every child. It is regarded as a normal emotional stage of child development. Separation anxiety usually begins when babies start to comprehend the concept of "object permanence" which indicates that things and people exist even when they are not present.

It is critical to note that a child showing extreme distress when being separated from their parents is not considered a normal stage of development, but rather a serious emotional problem known as separation anxiety disorder. Even so, normal separation anxiety and separation anxiety disorder share similar symptoms which often gets confusing. The key difference between the two that parents should be attentive about is the intensity of the child's fear and whether these fears keep them away from normal activities.

Anxious goodbyes are natural yet provoking for young children because they feel threatened by the fact that they are being separated from the care and protection of their parents. Despite the frustration, separation anxiety is manageable and will eventually pass. Hence, parents are encouraged to take certain measures in order to make the process of separation anxiety during the first day of school easier.

Traditions are one of the options used to ease separation anxiety because knowing what to expect can help children feel more secure and safe. Parents are advised to establish a morning ritual that helps children cope with the transition from home to school. This will help make sure that a child does not feel rushed and anxious. Furthermore, creating a special goodbye ritual or word with the child can also help the child know what to expect.

Similar to creating a special goodbye, parents should be attentive to the tone they set for their goodbyes. Children are highly sensitive to the mood of their parents. As a result, it is important for parents to set a calm and positive tone for their separation no matter how unhappy they may feel. The cheerful and serene expressions are likely to influence the child to run happily to class instead of clutching and wailing.

Also, parents should pay attention to the duration of their goodbyes. It is vital that parent do not prolong the goodbye based on how much the child is anxious. The lingering of parents when their child is having a hard time separating will make future separations even harder. Thus, parents are encouraged to give an extra hug and kiss when the child is upset but immediately detach themselves by giving a smiling goodbye.

Avoiding goodbyes can only make the problem worse. It is critical for parents not to sneak out when their child is not paying attention but rather make sure they know that they have left. Yet when having said goodbye, parents should make sure that they stay out of sight. Reappearing shortly after the initial goodbye for any reason will bring parents back to square one of the separating process.

Being separated from one's parents is a big deal for children; therefore parents should work hard to ensure that their child feels safe throughout the day. One way to help a child feel secure is by giving them something they love from home to carry through the school day. Moreover, placing an "I love you" note in the child's lunch box can be a good idea to help reassure the child throughout the time they are away.

The rough goodbye in the morning added to the day spent at school away from the parents is truly difficult for children. Consequently, parents should reward their child's effort of being separated from them. It is advisable that parents use even the smallest accomplishment during the child's day as a reason to praise and positively reinforce the child's behavior.

Tearful and tantrum filled goodbyes are common during the first day of school. Although it may be difficult, separation anxiety can be relieved and should fade as the child gets older. Accordingly by developing comforting and compassionate rituals with one's child, parents will be able to combat the pain and soreness that separation anxiety brings upon them and their child.

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