

Preparation for Separation

Starting Daycare or Nursery School is a major milestone for both parents and toddlers. This milestone does come with quite a bit of anxiety, and preparing your toddler for Nursery School can greatly reduce the separation anxiety they will have during drop-off, here are some ways to make the transition easier for both toddler and parent.

Explain the routines

Parents should talk to their toddlers about the things they will do, the games they will play, and the children they will meet. It is important to let them know that you will always come back to pick them up. It is also important for parents to never make promises they have no control over. This can cause setbacks in separation anxiety.

Meet the teachers

It is important to attend school open houses or welcome meetings, where parents, teachers and children can all meet. Parents should get to know the teachers and establish a positive relationship with them. If the toddler sees that the teachers are someone the parents like and trust, it will make it easier for them to form an attachment to the teachers, making the separation from the parent's smoother.



Visit the school

Parents should take the opportunity to see the school and the classroom before the toddler starts. Familiarize the toddler with some toys that they will play with or activities that they will do. Allow the toddler to know the surrounding area as well and point out the school by name whenever you pass by. This allows the toddler to see it as a normal and familiar place and not something to be scared or nervous about.

Keep it positive

Toddlers are very intuitive and will take cues from their parents, so if the parents are anxious chances are the toddler will be as well. It is important to stay confident and calm. Keep the conversation about going to school to a minimum and parents should never ask if the toddler is scared or nervous, this may trigger those emotions even if they are not there.

Role Play

Pretend play is a great way to help toddlers understand what to expect at daycare or nursery school. It is a great idea for parents to use toys to show what will happen. (for example, their stuffy goes to school and meets some friends, mommy stuffy leaves and comes back after stuffy and the friends play, sing songs, and have snack).

Read a book

Using stories and reading books can help the toddler understand what to expect and help them adjust to the idea of being separated from their parents.



SEPARATION ANXIETY IN TODDLERS

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*How to help children and
parents cope with separation*



Drop-Off

Drop-off is always going to be hard for both parent and child, but there are some things that can be done to help the transition go a little smoother.



Tearful, tantrum-filled goodbyes are common when dropping off your toddler at daycare or nursery school. This can be hard for both the child and the parents, but it is completely normal and there are ways to ease the transition and make the daycare experience more joyful for everyone!

What is Separation anxiety

Separation anxiety is the fear or worry a child may feel when a parent or a caregiver leaves. In toddlers this is usually demonstrated by crying or throwing a tantrum, and it can be difficult for the toddler to calm down as they may not have the full developmental capacity to self regulate.

Many toddlers can start demonstrating separation anxiety challenges at 15 or 18 months, even if they have not shown any signs of anxiety in infancy. Toddlers may become more aware of separation as they develop more independence. Separations can become more difficult when the toddlers are hungry, tired, or sick. (Swanson, 2021)

Goodbye ritual - Parents should establish a goodbye routine with their toddlers, this can be something as simple as a special hug, a secret handshake, a silly rhyme or just a wave at the window. This will help your child get preoccupied with the excitement of the ritual and not with the feeling of anxiety.

Attention- Parents must give their full attention to their child. Toddlers may feel more afraid and anxious if parents suddenly disappear, and they can have a harder time self-regulating. It is important to always say goodbye and ensure that you will be back soon.

Bring a comfort object - Allow the toddler to bring something familiar from home. A stuffy, a blanket or a book, are all things that can bring familiarity, and help the toddler self-regulate.

You came back! - during pick up, parents should always remind their toddlers that they came back, just like they said they would. This will give the toddler comfort and confidence that the same thing will happen the next day.

References

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