



Welcome to a New School Year!

Going back to school can be exciting for kids, but for some children, it can cause an onset of anxiety, especially as Covid continues. You can help your child so the transition back to school is less stressful.

SEPARATION ANXIETY

When we hear the term "separation anxiety", we often think of small children at the door of their preschool or kindergarten classroom, crying and latching on to a caregiver on the first day of school. What we don't typically think of is what we are seeing more and more since the onset of Covid-19: older children struggling with separation anxiety. Today, an increasing number of parents are seeing these same patterns of anxiety spikes in primary, middle and even high school-aged children when they go to school or when parents leave for work or leave for a short trip to the grocery store or to take the trash out. A parent's initial thought may be, "Why is this happening? My child is too old for this," or "They have never had issues with this before!" The fact is, the COVID-19 pandemic is changing attachment patterns worldwide; kids have spent more time at home socializing with family than ever before, experienced a period of isolation with caregivers, and are dealing with an ever-present concern of the health and safety of their loved ones (especially those with parents who are essential workers). Separation anxiety can produce difficulties managing schedules: Parents may wind up being late for work or feel unable to get out of the house for errands or alone time; students may have a hard time making it through the school day or refuse to go at all. This ends up taking a toll on the mental health of both the child and parent.

So, what can be done?

- **Promote a healthy lifestyle.** Encourage regular exercise and activity, healthy meals, and a structured, calming bedtime routine. Children with separation anxiety may struggle at bedtime with nightmares or sleeping in their own rooms. Being consistent in these areas will set the foundation for your child's day.
- **Prepare separations.** Discuss the fact that you will be leaving home and when you will be coming back (let the child know this may be an approximate time). Each child is different, and some kids may prefer to know farther in advance when a parent will be leaving. For others, this may cause more anxiety to have a longer waiting period. Talk with your child and see what they prefer. Planned check-ins through phone calls or texts while you are out can be helpful, but be sure to set clear limits on the number of calls/texts that should be made (with exceptions for true emergencies).
- **Involve your child.** If you are planning to grocery shop for instance, let your child be present when preparing the grocery list or walk through what your outing may involve. Anxious children typically fear the uncertainty of the situation, so feeling they know what their caregiver is doing when gone will be helpful in easing fears.
- **Engage and distract.** Prepare a list of activities your child can participate in while you are gone. Encourage and praise your child when they choose to engage in activities while you are away to distract themselves from anxious thoughts.
- **Consider seeking support yourself.** There is a good chance if you are experiencing anxiety yourself, it may be picked up by your child. Separation anxiety can be draining for parents, as they may worry about their child more, may be getting less sleep and may have disrupted routines themselves. Seeking support for yourself when needed will help you be the best "you", which will in turn help your child.

As always, we are in your corner if you need extra support!