

TIP SHEET: Separation Anxiety

Ages Affected: 6 months–4 years old

When separated from their parents, children can get worried and scared of new people. This is what we call separation anxiety.

Signs of Separation Anxiety:

Children react differently to separation and strangers—some are scared, while others show no reaction. Children also act differently when they reunite with their parents—some get upset and cry, while others get angry and ignore their parents.

Here are a few tips to help you and your child:

- Ease them into it. You don't even have to leave the house to get started. Tell your baby or toddler that you'll be going to another room and you'll be back soon. This will help them understand that although you are gone now you will come back.
- Practice separation. Leave your child with a caregiver for brief periods and short distances at first.
- The more anxious you are about leaving or about others caring for your little one, the more anxious your child will be. Be calm, confident and reassuring. And when you do return, take time to enjoy a warm welcome and extra hugs. Being apart makes reuniting that much sweeter.
- Don't feel guilty. Remind yourself that this is a stage and you both will get through it. You aren't a bad parent for leaving your child in tears. Remind yourself that you are working to raise a healthy, independent adult.
- Tell your child you are leaving and that you will return, then go—don't stall.
- Leave happy, with a smile! Trying to sneak quickly out the door so your baby doesn't cry actually does more harm. Say goodbye and then help your child



become involved in a fun activity that will occupy him as you leave.

- Develop “goodbye” signals. This will comfort your child. Signals can be as simple and as fun as a special wave through the window or a goodbye kiss.
- Things like a favorite blanket or stuffed toy can help comfort small children. In fact, to your child, these items are a symbol of you. They represent comfort, safety, and joy. Allowing your child to attach to a blanket or stuffed toy as a baby will allow him to be better at self-soothing later on.
- Leave your child with a babysitter/caregiver that you and your child trust.
- Praise your child's good behavior. When your child smiles and talks to new people give her praise to encourage this behavior.