

How to Do a Long-Slow-Good-bye to Ease Separation Anxiety



Connect well.

Children need to feel close to someone before they feel safe enough to release their feelings. So the first step in helping a child with separation is to add more warmth and connection around the time when good-by must be said. A period of parent-child or caregiver-child Special Time that includes warmth, eye contact, and laughter will help strengthen the child's sense of connection.

Initiate the separation

Then allow a long, tearful good-bye. Offer your warmth and support as the child cries, trembles, and struggles. This process of showing feelings fully with someone who will listen is natural, healthy, and deeply beneficial to the child. The longer the parent stays, the safer it will be for the child to show the feelings of desperation he or she has. The parent can do this listening, or the caregiver, or both. **In any case, these are the steps to follow:**



Stay close, but not too close.

You want the child to feel your support, but also to feel the separation he is afraid of. Offer him eye contact and affection. If he burrows into you and stops crying, move him gently so that he can see you. Your attention will help him feel the grief again.

Listen to his tears and fears until he's finished, if you can.

This is the fastest way for children to regain their confidence that all is well. For children who have big anxieties, crying with a safe person for thirty to sixty minutes at first is common. Repeated cries over several days or weeks may be necessary to relieve all of the child's fears.

