

## **Parent Series: Coping with Separation Anxiety at Preschool**

Many preschoolers struggle with separation anxiety when they are dropped off at preschool. Preschool is often one of the first experiences that children have away from their parents or primary caregiver. Some preschoolers will scream or cry when they are dropped off at preschool. This could go on for weeks without any improvement. It does not mean that your preschooler is not enjoying preschool, although it is something to watch if it does not improve over time. It is very common for your preschooler to experience some separation anxiety when you leave.



Preschoolers who struggle with drop offs may be a little bit shy or they may simply be cautious when placed in new situations. It is scary for a preschooler to suddenly experience life away from their primary caregiver. Once they learn to trust their new teacher and get to know the other preschoolers in the class their fears will subside.

### **Be Confident**

If your preschooler is nervous about being left at preschool, it is important for you to show that you are confident that you are leaving them in a safe place. If you are nervous about leaving your preschooler they will sense it and your anxiety will heighten their fear. If you need to, give yourself a few minutes to regroup before leaving the house. Cry about your baby growing up, think about leaving them somewhere else, do whatever it is you need to do in private, but do not do it in front of your preschooler.

Smile and greet your preschooler's new teacher with confidence and show your preschooler that you trust that they will be cared for and protected while you are gone. When you hug your preschooler goodbye make sure that you are not locking them in a 'death grip'! Give them a gentle hug and a smile.

### **Be Consistent**

If you do the same thing every time you drop your preschooler off at preschooler they will learn to trust the routine. Give your preschooler a quick hug and a kiss, reassure them that you will be back soon to pick them up, and walk out the door. The longer you stay and talk the harder drop offs will be. Your preschooler will see an opportunity to talk you into staying or taking them with you and will act up. Leave it to the preschool teacher to engage your preschooler in an activity. This will encourage your preschooler to trust their preschool teacher and create a healthy bond between them.

### **Be Prepared for Relapses**

Separation anxiety is not limited to the beginning of the school year. Any change in a preschoolers life such as a new sibling, a move, or stress at home, can trigger a new string of difficult drop-offs. Relapses are not likely to last as long as they did at first but they can be frustrating when you have already been through it. Follow the same technique that you did the first time and eventually your preschooler will regain their confidence.

### **Related Preschool Book**

[The Kissing Hand](#) tells the story of a little raccoon who does not want to go to school. His mother tells him all the reasons why he is going to love going to school and promises that she will be home waiting for him when school is over. She gives him a special kiss that will stay with him when he feels lonely at school.