

**Norland  
Know-Hows**

**Leaving your child**

## Leaving your child

Separation anxiety is very common. It can peak during the age range of six months to nine months but can also extend into the toddler phase and beyond depending on the child's temperament and personality. Be assured that it is a normal part of development, and most children grow out of it. Remember, all children are unique and will respond differently.

### Preparation is key!

Make sure that you are organised for the first day back at nursery or school. Leave yourself plenty of time to get there, and stay if necessary. Do a practice run if you need to! Talk to your child about what they might need to take.

Read stories about going to nursery/school so that they can build a narrative for themselves and ask questions.

### Create a routine

Create a routine for leaving the house and arriving at nursery/school. Follow it consistently and calmly. For example, your child gets a toy, then finds their coat, then puts their shoes on. Play the same music/sound in the car on the journey and follow the same routine when arriving. This will help your child feel calm and able to predict what is going to happen. (We have a separate blog about establishing routines for children.)

### Create a goodbye ritual

This could be kisses and a little saying between the two of you (my daughter is 25 and we still say it to each other!). It makes your child feel special and loved and again will provide reassurance. Keep it quick and simple. Be prepared for tears! If you must leave them upset, make sure that the person you have left them with knows how best to comfort them. Do not mention that they have cried or make a big fuss about it afterwards.

### Talk

Talk to your child about what they can expect when they get there – particularly as some of the routines will have changed due to coronavirus. Make sure that they know where the toilet is, and where to hang their coat and put their bag – these little things can weigh heavily on a child's mind if they are uncertain. If your child is particularly anxious, ask the nursery/school if you can visit beforehand so that your child can see where everything is. For a child at school, make sure that they know who to go to if in trouble and that they feel safe. Talk through the day and what it might look like. Some children will benefit from a timeline in photos to look at, which helps them orientate themselves during the day. Do not laugh or trivialise any fears that they might have, listen carefully, and answer honestly. (We have a separate blog about talking to children about COVID-19.)

### Role model

Remember that you are always a role model to your child, so remember to try to appear calm and matter-of-fact. It is common and perfectly normal to feel guilty and anxious, but try not to convey that to your child – wait until after you have dropped them off to cry and get a hug!

### Transitional object

Younger children in particular benefit from choosing something to take with them to nursery/school. It can provide a 'bridge' between home and the setting, which makes the transition easier and helps them feel closer to home and their parents. Allow them to choose, but try to ensure that it is not too

fragile or precious – or alive! Make sure you check with the setting, as they might have their own rules. Do not worry if it is always the same object.

Some children benefit from having photos of loved ones and pets with them to look at when they are feeling sad.

You might also give them something that lets them know that you're thinking of them (we call this 'being held in mind'). For example, you could print a photo of the two of you and have one each, and tell them that you'll be looking at the photo during the day and will be thinking of them, and that they could do the same.

### **Leaving**

Never sneak off while your child is distracted. Always say goodbye, even if it is upsetting for both of you. By sneaking off, you create anxiety in your child, and they will be looking for you to disappear when you are with them, making them clingier in the long run.

If you are worried about your child, ask the setting if you can ring later to check on how they are doing – otherwise you will spend the day worrying!

Avoid comparing yourself and your child to others – create your own system which works for both of you.

### **Short separations**

If you think that you will have particular problems leaving your child, then you could start practising by leaving them for short periods of time and building the duration up gradually. This way, your child will learn that you go, but you also return.

### **Keep your promises**

If you promise something – for instance, to pick them up at a certain time – make sure that you do. By keeping your word, you help your child to feel more secure about being left, and they know that you can be trusted.

### **Put a note in your child's lunchbox**

Put a note in with their lunch to remind them that you love them. Make sure that they can open any food packaging easily and quickly, as most children do not have a long time to eat lunch.

### **Threats**

Try to resist the temptation of saying, "What will your teacher/key person think of this behaviour?", or "You will have to do this when you go to nursery or school", as it sets negative assumptions in their minds. Also, try not to offer rewards – for example, "If you don't cry, I will buy you sweets" – as your child will come to expect them all the time.

Use emotion coaching instead. Say: "I know you're feeling upset about starting nursery. Doing something new can feel a bit scary and strange sometimes. Remember we talked about this? I will be thinking of you and I'll be here again to fetch you and hear about all the fun play you've had." (We have a separate blog about emotion coaching and behaviour.)

This information is intended to provide guidance only. It is not exhaustive and should not be seen as a substitute for updating or enhancing your knowledge by completing training or a CPD course on the subject.