

All About Separation Anxiety

By Elizabeth Pantley, author of *The No-Cry Separation Anxiety Solution*

It's a common scene at any daycare, playground or birthday party: *a crying child clinging to a parent who is desperately trying to convince the child to let go and join the fun. Almost all children have some aspect of separation anxiety during the first six years of life. Separation anxiety should not be feared or even wished away, as it is the most obvious and identifiable sign of your child's love and trust in you. It is the demonstration of the wonderful job you are doing as you raise your child. It is the grand indicator that your child believes that you represent the ultimate in safety and security, above anyone or anything else in this world.*



What causes Separation Anxiety?

Separation anxiety is a perfectly normal and important developmental adaptation of a child's emotional and mental growth. It does not have a particular "cause." Nothing you have done has "made" your child develop separation anxiety.

Even though separation anxiety has not been caused by any particular action or event, there are caregiver actions that can either heighten or reduce a child's anxiety. There are many things that can help build a child's trust and confidence in his relationship with you so that he can transfer these feelings to other trusted adults who will help him feel safe away from his home base.

How common is it?

It makes perfect sense that children experience separation anxiety when pulled apart from their main caregiver. Nearly all children experience some aspect of separation anxiety. For some children the stage begins earlier, even at a few months of age. For some, the effects begin later, and some children have anxiety that lasts for longer spells than others. Some children have very visible, obvious

indicators of their feelings, but there are also children who have less apparent reactions. There is no exact pattern or set of symptoms, but almost all children have it to some degree.

Does my child have separation anxiety?

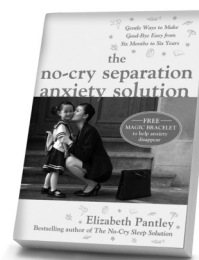
Separation anxiety has many different symptoms, but it is often easy for parents to spot in their own child. It helps if you know exactly what to look for. The following are behaviors are most typically used to define normal separation anxiety:

- Clinginess
- Crying when a parent is out of sight
- Strong preference for only one parent over all other human beings
- Fear of strangers, or of family and friends who are not frequently seen
- Resistance to separation at bedtime or naptime
- Waking at night crying for a parent
- Regression to an earlier stage of development, such as thumb-sucking or babytalk
- Anxiety that is easily eliminated upon a parent's appearance

This too shall pass

Separation anxiety doesn't have a specific beginning nor does it have an exact end. It shows itself in peaks and valleys – good days and bad days, good weeks and bad, and even good years followed by bad weeks. It can be bewildering to parents when their child shifts from confidence to anxiety and back again many times during the first six to eight years of life, but this unpredictable behavior is very normal. Gaining the maturity and skills to handle separation with confidence is a process, not a single event.

This stage, like so many others in childhood, will pass. In time, your child will learn that she can separate from you, that you will return, and that everything will be okay between those two points in time. Much of this learning is based on trust and experience, which, just as for every human being young or old, takes time to build.



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From *The No-Cry Separation Anxiety Solution* by Elizabeth Pantley (McGraw-Hill). Here is the link for information and more excerpts: <http://www.pantley.com/elizabeth/>