



Fact Sheet

Supporting Children with Separation Anxiety with Caregiver

General Overview

Children's lives are always marked with transitions of change. Most of the changes that occur in a child's life is positive and part of growing up, such as a new baby in the family, moving up to the next group in day care, starting school, changing houses. However there still can exist within each situation an anxiety if the child is separated from the adult he/she feels comfortable and safe with. Separation protest is a reflection of the child's fear of being separated from his or her caregiver. This fear can be transferred from the separation from the parent to separating from the caregiver. Most children have developed cognitively to cope with separation during stressful times. Some children may appear to regress which is initiated by a new factor occurring within their lives.

Suggested Strategies

- Work closely with the parents – it is easier to establish a safe and consistent environment if the parent/s and the caregivers are working together.
- Assess your program – identify aspects of your program that triggers stressful behaviour by the child. Modify and change to decrease these triggers. e.g. if child gets upset when you leave the room provide an activity or “job” to do while you are away such as “can you set up the blocks so that they are ready when I come back”
- Reinforce that you will return- tell the child you will be back and even call out when you are out of the child's sight. Reinforce that you did return like you said you would.
- Connect with the parent – aim to keep connecting the child with the parent e.g. “Mummy packed a really nice lunch for you today.”
- Sharing your care- Provide opportunities to let the child know that you do care for him but you also care for the other children. Use activities of turn taking and sharing to reinforce this concept.
- Communicate to child what you are doing – continue to tell the child what you are doing even if child continues to be upset. E.g. “I am going to get ... up from his/her sleep so that we all can play together”

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- Identify child's interests – aim to incorporate child's interests, likes or dislikes into the experiences you provide. If you have a younger child in care illicit the assistance of the older child to “help’ you. i.e. give the child some responsibility
- Focus on relationship building through routines –creating a stable and predictable routine such as arrival time, lets the child know that while lots of changes maybe occurring elsewhere here is a place that remains the same.
- Support the child's social development –provide individual or small group activities that assist in recognising all children in the group and value their individual skills and differences. e.g. activities that require turn taking . These activities can also focus on areas of the child's interests.
- Model appropriate social behaviour –greet the child on arrival and departure, making eye contact and showing that you enjoy having the child in the group.
- Model this behaviour with all children
- Provide calming activities – create calming environments such as waterplay, bubble blowing, relaxation CD's, quiet reading, quiet place for the child to retreat.
- Initiate activities that encourages a child's interest – e.g. if a child shows interest in a topic or certain art/craft area provide these activities. Gain the child's involvement by encouraging the child to assist in setting up these activities.

References

- Greenman J. (2002) *What happened to the world? - Helping children cope in turbulent times.*
Pademelon Press Australia

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