



COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE & LIFE SCIENCES

**Cooperative
Extension**

Pima County – Family Engagement Program

Separation Anxiety Guidelines and Tips for Child Care

- **Separation anxiety looks like:**
 - Crying or whining when parent has left them with you
 - Refusing to participate and reverting to behaviors of younger child
- **Your goal is to:**
 - Acknowledge feelings and provide comfort
- Do NOT ignore/distract emotions
- Always try to do a physical handoff from mother to child care provider
- Do NOT have mother distract child and then sneak away
- Always try to wave goodbye to mother from door or window and soothe child by confirming that they will see their mother after the meeting.
- **How to handle separation anxiety in infants:**
 - Hold infant and provide comfort through soothing tones
 - Show infant something visually stimulating, but do NOT over-offer with several objects
 - Make sure basic needs are met (food, drink, diaper)
- **How to handle separation anxiety in toddlers:**
 - If toddler is attached to mom and does not want to let go, try panda bear technique.
 - Hold child and talk soothingly
 - Acknowledge their feelings and emotions
 - Do NOT label emotions if not sure, rather use generic phrases like “I can see that you are upset”
 - Reassure child of parents’ return
 - Talk through a routine of the day (play, snack, read, then your mama will come back)
 - Offer a toy or game that may be of interest, but do not over offer
 - Try the bye-bye box

- **How to handle separation anxiety in preschoolers:**
 - Sit next to distressed child
 - Acknowledge feelings and emotions
 - Do NOT label emotions if not sure, rather use generic phrases like “I can see that you are upset”
 - Invite child to talk about feelings
 - Ask for and provide physical comfort if requested by child
 - Reassure child of parents’ return
 - Talk through a routine of the day (play, snack, read, then your mama will come back)
 - Offer a toy or game that may be of interest, but do not over offer
 - Suggest an interesting activity

- **Some notes:**
 - Do not encourage family members to sneak away from the child
 - Do not take separation anxiety personally
 - Do not tell child to stop crying or shame the child for crying
 - If child resists physical contact do not try to hold the child
 - Above all, be prepared for child’s arrival and welcome each child by name as they arrive.

References:

American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, & National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education. (2013). *Stepping Stones to Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards; Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs*. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics.

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