



Settling Children in School

Children who, for the first time, will be separated from their parents may experience separation anxiety. Below is an extract from "Raising Emotionally Healthy Kids" written by H. Norman Wright (P.191-192):

Separation anxiety is most likely to occur when a parent is gone for a long period of time. A brief separation is not usually a problem if parents handle it wisely. Because of employment, day care and kindergarten, short periods of separation between young children and parents is unavoidable. The younger the child, the more careful a parent must be to make it a positive experience for them.

Anxiety creates more anxiety. Sometimes the anxiety is as much the parents' as it is the children's. When this is the case, children will tend to adopt their parents' stress as their own. To minimize the anxiety caused by your absence, here are some suggestions:

1. *Take it slowly.*
Take time to assure your children before you leave and explain when you will return. It helps to develop rituals for separating, like three kisses and a wave good-bye. These rituals help to comfort your child and build confidence that you will return when you say you will. (This can also be done at the bus stop.)
2. *Take time to familiarize your kids with their environment and care-giver.*
If at all possible, spend some time with your child in his/her new setting by walking through the school building before their first day. They will be able to associate you with the new person and environment. Please come and visit when you have time.
3. *Make your reunion a fun time.*
Developing hello rituals with a long hug and a brief talk about the day or three winks – gives your child something to look forward to. He/she needs the comfort of a routine.
4. *Don't sneak away.*
Be up front and always say good-bye, even if your child becomes upset. The best way to create anxiety is for him/her to suddenly realize you are gone.
5. *Don't become angry if your kids protest your departure.*
If your child clings and fusses when you begin to leave, reassure him/her again that you will return. Give him/her an extra hug and a few extra moments before handing him/her over to the teacher. If you begin to feel frustrated, remember that he/she probably will soon get over his/her distress.

6. *Don't be irregular in picking up your kids.*

When a child has to wait for his/her parent, anxiety rises dramatically, so try to create some consistency in your schedule when picking him/her up.

7. *Don't become upset if your kids try to punish you for being away.*

If your child hides from you or demonstrates anger because you've been away, just accept his/her behaviour as a sign of their love and allow some time to get reacquainted.

Some children may suddenly develop a pain in the leg, stomach upsets etc. Again, this is another way of expressing his/her feelings about separation from you.

We have found that it is best if the parents remain calm and matter-of-fact. This will be hard when your child screams and clings to you. We can assure you that as soon as he/she becomes involved with some activities in class, his/her tears will stop. Too much sympathy at this time may prolong the adjustment period. On the orientation day, please feel free to visit the kitchen and help yourself to tea/coffee/cold drink until your child is ready to be picked up.

During this adjustment period, we suggest that you refrain from too much discussion at home about school and keep bedtimes consistent. It is recommended for children to sleep at 7.30 PM for a 7.30 AM rising time. See that your household routines are consistent and that bedtime is a pleasant time. Your child may be more tired and irritable during this adjustment period.

Send your child to school every day. Do not under any circumstances allow your child to talk you into leaving him/her at home. Tell him/her to have a happy day. No bribes or threats.

You can anticipate your child catching more colds and other illnesses if this is his/her first exposure to a large number of other children. This is why it is important that he/she receives more rest during this period.

Take a real interest in any work your child brings home. Find a place to hang it on the wall so the entire family can enjoy it.

Feel free to call us anytime about your child's adjustment. Remember that this period is but a passing moment when we compare it with the tremendous growth your child will make within a short time.

We have generally found that if the parent adjusts well to the separation, the child adjusts quickly also.