

## Coping with Separation Anxiety: Tips for Montessori Parents

**Make the goodbye prompt and positive.** This sounds easy, but can often be one of the most difficult things to do. Giving your child “one more minute” or staying to work on a puzzle together simply prolongs the inevitable. As a parent, the best thing you can do is give your child a hug and kiss, say, “I love you” and reassure him/her that you will be back soon.

**Establish a goodbye routine.** Preschoolers crave routine and Montessori parents who establish a consistent goodbye routine usually have better luck with successful goodbyes. I have seen parents use a secret handshake with their child or a secret hand gesture. Other parents give their child a kiss on the forehead or offer a reassuring thumbs-up or rub noses with their child. By giving your child something he can count on, he is likely to go to school much more willingly and that special moment between the two of you is a great way to start the day and provide that sense of reassurance.

**Trust your child's teacher.** This may be difficult to do when you do not yet know your child's Montessori teacher that well, but keep in mind that Montessori preschool teachers have chosen this profession because they love children and they have a wealth of ideas and strategies to help settle a child who is feeling upset. The strategies might involve anything from a nurturing hug, redirection, pairing them up with another Montessori student or simply keeping the child close until he/she is ready to engage with an activity. Ask your child's Montessori teacher to step in to help with goodbyes when you give the sign that you are ready to go.

**Acknowledge how your child is feeling.** It is important to accept and respect your child's temporary unhappiness as it is very real and very normal. Say things like “I know you feel sad when Mommy leaves, but you will have a good time, and I will be back very soon.” Avoid the temptation to pressure your child not to cry or to offer bribes for “good behavior”. Learning to cope with sadness is an important learning process for your child.

**Never sneak out on a child.** As tempting as it is, sneaking out the door can make matters worse. Although you do not have to stay to witness a meltdown, it may be very upsetting for the child when they realize Mom or Dad has simply disappeared without saying goodbye and it can make the next day even more difficult. The best thing a parent can do is deal directly with the situation and before you know it, the tearful goodbyes will be no more. Besides, you want your child to know unequivocally that he/she can trust you.

**Ask for help.** Sometimes stepping back from the drop off routine can make a huge difference in how your child reacts. Often, a child who experiences separation anxiety with one parent is absolutely fine if the other parent does the drop off. You could also try having another relative, close friend or grandparent give it a try for a few days.

**Do not linger.** As a parent, I know how reassuring it can be to stay to peek at your child through the window. However, for the child, it can be pure torture. As a child, seeing your parent when you are upset, but not being able to be with your parent is not a good feeling. My suggestion to Montessori parents is to leave quickly and if you are feeling really uneasy, call the school in 15-20 minutes to ask how your child is doing. Chances are, he/she settled within a few minutes.

**Stay calm and be enthusiastic.** Modeling the appropriate behavior is key to a smooth transition from home to Montessori classroom, so try very hard to ensure your child does not sense your anxiety. Talk about how much fun Montessori preschool will be, talk about her friends and classmates. Discuss the different works she might want to choose and reinforce how lucky she is to have such a special school and that you cannot wait to hear about her day when you pick her up.

**Always be on time.** Arriving late can often spark separation anxiety. Arriving late can be upsetting to some children as the Montessori class has already. Give yourselves plenty of time in the morning. Children often get anxious when rushed, so do your best to give your child extra time in the morning to get ready and to arrive at school on time with the group. Additionally, it is important to be punctual when picking up your child. I know how easy it is to lose track of time, but no matter who is picking your child up, whether it is you or someone else, make sure you are there on time. If you are late, it can cause your child even more anxiety and make dropping her off the next time that much harder.

**Encourage friendships.** Make a point to set up 'playdates' for your child. Invite children from the Montessori class over, so your child can make friendships that will in turn make the transition to the new Montessori environment easier.

**Be prepared for regression.**

Just when you think your child has conquered his/her feelings of separation anxiety, along comes a weekend or an illness that keeps your child home for a few days and you are right back to square one. As frustrating and upsetting as this can be, it is perfectly normal. Stick to the above strategies and you should notice a significant difference in a couple of days.