

SEPARATION ANXIETY

What is Separation Anxiety?

- ✓ Separation from parents is an important part of growing up. As a parent, understand that your child needs to be able to manage separations and the anxiety associated with them.
- ✓ Sometimes, children, upon realizing that their parents are leaving their presence, are suddenly seized with the fear that their parents are leaving them forever. They may not truly understand that you are leaving and returning for them.
- ✓ Ask yourself: *How would you feel if your child just disappeared?* Your child's feelings are similar.



What Can You Do To Help Your Child Separate?

- ✓ When preparing to leave your child, plan extra time. Let your child get comfortable and gain some familiarity with the new surroundings.
- ✓ A toy, blanket, or familiar object may help your child to feel more at ease, and help him or her to remember that you are coming back.
- ✓ Make farewells warm, but brief. Leave the child with a trusted caretaker and always say goodbye. **DO NOT SNEAK OUT!** Tell your child that you are leaving, give a kiss and a hug, and let them know that you are coming back.
- ✓ Upon returning, show lots of love and affection toward your child and remind them that you will always come back to get them.
- ✓ Playing games such as “peek-a-boo”, crawling through a tunnel, and “jack-in-the-box” when you are together can also be helpful. It gives your child playful practice at leaving and returning.
- ✓ Good routines and rituals are always helpful for children. This gives them a sense of predictability and can be especially helpful when saying goodbye. Try to develop a routine (put coat in cubby, enter classroom for play, etc.) and/or rituals (i.e. special goodbye kisses or hugs).

Prepared by: Aminah Wells, LGSW; Carole Norris-Shortle, LCSW-C; Kim Cosgrove, LCSW-C; Kennedy Krieger Institute, Center for Infant Study, PACT's Therapeutic Nursery