

Positive Separation

Starting kinder is a very exciting step and it can also bring about some level of anxiety or worry for some children.

The key to a successful transition is consistency, predictability and ensuring the child is aware of the daily routine.

Separation Anxiety: This is a normal developmental stage for young children as they have formed an attachment with their primary caregiver. If a child has been in care for some time and continues to show signs of separation anxiety then making a plan with the family for Drop-off and Pick-up times to include individualised strategies may assist this process.

Separation anxiety can be exhibited through physical characteristics such as crying, clinging to a carer, a fear of being abandoned or a stomachache or headache. The child may have a fear that their needs may not be met without them.

Preparation and communication are key for Positive Separation

Suggestions for families

Prepare for the day

- It may be helpful to have the kinder bag, clothes, snack etc. prepared the night before to assist with a calm kinder morning.
- Invite the child to have a role in getting ready for kinder.
- Lots of positive talk about kinder and the fun activities they will be offered.
- Providing them with icy cold water to drink through a straw or a crunchy cold breakfast snack can assist to reduce the heart rate and stress levels by calming the nervous system.
- Play some favourite music in the car on the way to kinder, talk about things you can see out the window.
- If walking to kinder, talk about what you see, hear and smell on the way.
- Acknowledge the child's feeling and use consistent language.
- Reassure your child of when you will be there to pick them up (After lunch – after rest time etc.)
- Try to stay calm as this will assist your child to feel more relaxed.
- Make drop off as quick as possible once your child is settled or has entered the room/ play space.
- Lots of positive language at pick up time about what the child did at kinder that day.
- Communication - Talk to the Teacher/Staff about what helps your child settle at home. What are their interests, what makes them happy, what books/characters they like etc. Make a separation plan.

For Teachers and Educators

Arrival at Kindergarten

- Build a strong and trusted relationship with the child and their family, through open communication and empathy.
- Take into account the child's background. Have they been in care before? Has there been any trauma they have experienced? Etc.
- Provide a personal warm welcome to the child, come up with a greeting that they would prefer.
- Provide consistent language for a "Quick" goodbye. Long goodbyes can lead to more heightened anxiety. Then include the child in a favourite activity or a sensory, big movement activity.
- Provide a consistent morning routine. Put bag away, lunch on trolley, big quick hug for mum/dad/carer and let's go look at a story, or a favourite activity.
- Do not suggest families sneak away while the child is distracted as this can impact the trust they are building with the teacher/Educator.
- Acknowledge the child's feelings and provide consistent reassurance.
- Kinder Daily Routine visuals can assist children to understand when pick up time will be. Also offering them a choice of two activities either verbally, or using visuals will assist to move them from separation to an activity.
- Provide calming music and lighting in the room.
- A family photo can provide an opportunity for the child to talk about their family members. Look at photos of other Children's families.
- A transitional item may be useful – have a plan around where this special item will stay at kinder.
- Once a child is able to enter the centre more calmly then pairing them up with a friend may be helpful.
- When the child is calmer later in the day it may be helpful to talk to them about what helps them to feel calm and what they may like to happen at drop off time. (This would be dependent on the child's age and developmental level).
- Encourage independence through activities such as class room jobs or with roles to play. Building confidence and a sense of belonging.
- Provide yourself with some calming strategies as well as this can be a stressful time.
- Make a plan with the family around what the Transition strategies are going to be – see example on next page.

Departure from Kindergarten

- Ensure that the children are aware of pick up time. Again visuals are useful to help them track when this will be.
- Remind families of the importance of arriving at the scheduled time.

If separation challenges continue for a prolonged period of time it may be worthwhile to talk with the family about accessing additional supports.

Separation Anxiety

- ❖ <https://raisingchildren.net.au/babies/behaviour/common-concerns/separation-anxiety>
- ❖ <https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/health-daily-care/mental-health/anxiety-stapladder-approach>
- ❖ <https://www.playmoveimprove.com.au> Search Separation
- ❖ <https://aussiechildcarenetwork.com.au/articles/childcare-articles/supporting-families-with-separation-anxiety-in-childcare>

Building Confidence and nurturing self-esteem

- ❖ <https://aussiechildcarenetwork.com.au/articles/childcare-articles/building-confidence-in-children>
- ❖ <https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/behaviour/understanding-behaviour/about-self-esteem>

Kinder Separation Plan for _____

- Discuss what helps the child settle at home/ or in other environments – what techniques are used so these can be consistent across environments.

- Provide a special item that can be bought in and kept in a certain place? Where?

- Would a social story/ Visuals of daily routine be useful? Who will develop?

- Special box of items that they may like to look at/Play with. Family Photos?

- Settling them at an activity or with a particular Educator?

- Give a big Drop off cuddle and reminder of when they will be picked up.
- Keep a relaxed and happy posture and look on your face.
- Leave as quickly as possible.
- Would the Parent like a call to assure them that they have settled? _____
- Arrive promptly at the designated time for pick up.
- Lots of positive talk about kinder and praise for being so brave at drop off time. Talk about how proud they should be of themselves.
- If separation anxiety persists further support could be accessed - such as a Preschool Field Officer Visit or other referral Pathways can be discussed.

Other Creative Ideas that may assist with Separation challenges

- Draw a symbol (heart) on both your hands – The hearts are connected and the child can press on theirs when they miss you throughout the day. A visual reminder that they are connected to you even when you are not there.
- Hold their worries – Write down or draw their worries on some paper and show them you will keep this with you while they are away – so they can enjoy their time at kinder.

<https://www.littlezaks.com.au/>