

Kindy Kids Connect

Build & cultivate resilience in children.



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SEPARATION ANXIETY

It's normal for children to experience some separation anxiety when settling into new environments like starting school. Tearful, overwhelmed and clingy goodbyes at the school gate are common. These big emotions are hard for kids and parents. Putting the right supports and strategies in place can help make it easier on everyone.

The research tells us that when we safely and gradually face our fears and nothing bad happens—our brain learns that the thing it was scared of is actually not bad or dangerous at all. When children are struggling to attend school because of separation anxiety we have to show them that (a) school is safe and fun (b) their loved ones will still be there for them when the school day is done.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

Make a plan ahead of time

This might include (1) meeting with your child's school so that they can be prepared to assist when your child arrives at school, (2) recruiting supports from friends/family to help out with the drop off. Kids can sometimes find it easier to separate at the school gates if dropped off by someone who's not their parent, (3) Asking an older sibling/cousin/friend who attends the same school to walk inside with the child who's anxious, (4) building a social story with your child with pictures and reminders of their favourite people at school and favourite activities they get to do at school.

Set a quick and calm goodbye ritual

Having a predictable routine helps keep anxious feelings under control. This includes your 'goodbye' routine. It's important not to linger and let your own emotions overwhelm you when you're saying goodbye. If you model contagious calm when it's time to say goodbye, it helps your child feel reassured that there is nothing to worry about. Your ritual with your child might be a quick wave, kiss, or hug and a "see you this afternoon". Once the ritual is completed it's important to leave and let your child settle in at school.

Set them up for success

Be mindful of any additional overwhelm-triggers that might be making it harder for your child to manage their feelings. Even adults find it difficult to regulate their emotions if you:

- Haven't had a good night sleep
- Haven't had breakfast/are hungry
- Are feeling rushed / stressed or that the people around them are stressed

Supports available at School

School staff
Pastoral care staff
CatholicCare school counselling program

Contact your school for more information!

It's not always possible to prevent additional stressors—but the more you can manage these, the more likely your child will experience success with managing their anxious feelings. This might mean no technology on school nights, packing snacks for the drive in the morning, leaving plenty of time to get to school, playing your child's favourite music on the way to school, or even walking to school together if you live close by to get the nervous energy out. Whatever works for your child and your family.

Why are some children more anxious than others?

Some children are naturally more anxious than others, while other children develop specific anxieties after experiencing stressful life events. Some children may also process the information around them differently, and can sometimes find busy or loud environments more overwhelming than other children. If you think your child's anxiety may be a little more complicated than age-typical difficulties with separation, then it might be worth having a conversation with your school counsellor about strategies to try. Alternatively, speak to your GP about a referral for a Psychologist. Psychologists work with all age groups, including kindy kids, and can help answer any questions you may have.

Supporting your child experiencing anxiety

Understanding how to support your child though feelings of anxiety can be very challenging. This group will help you understand more about your child's needs and how you can support and encourage your child to effectively manage their anxiety.

To learn more about the supporting your child through anxiety course visit:
<https://www.catholiccare.dow.org.au/services-and-programs/family/family-care/courses/supporting-your-child-experiencing-anxiety/> or call 4254 9395.



GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you have any questions or concerns around how anxiety may be impacting your child and their ability to thrive at school, don't hesitate to get in touch. Schools can also make a referral to the CatholicCare School Counselling Program.

**Together
in Care.**

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