Strategies for Easing Separation Anxiety in Preschoolers

The following strategies are taken from a variety of sources and should provide you with practical solutions to help your child separate from you more easily:

1. Make sure your child gets enough sleep and eats well!

Children are more likely to feel more stressed when they are tired and/or hungry.

2. Get organized.

Having structure in the morning with areas designated for clothes, backpack, homework, lunch and breakfast helps to get through the morning with less chaos.

The following hole punch schedule for morning routine will help your child take responsibility for getting ready in the morning. This strategy can be used with children as young as 3 years. Younger children may need a more immediate reward. Older children can wait until the end of the week before receiving a reward for a successful week. Make sure rewards are small and are

things that your child really likes. You may need to change the reward periodically.

School Morning Routine

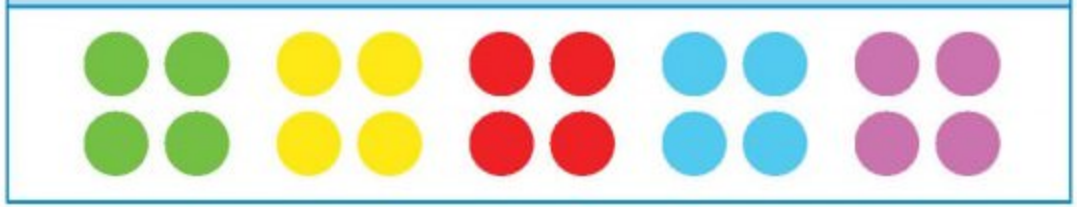
name:

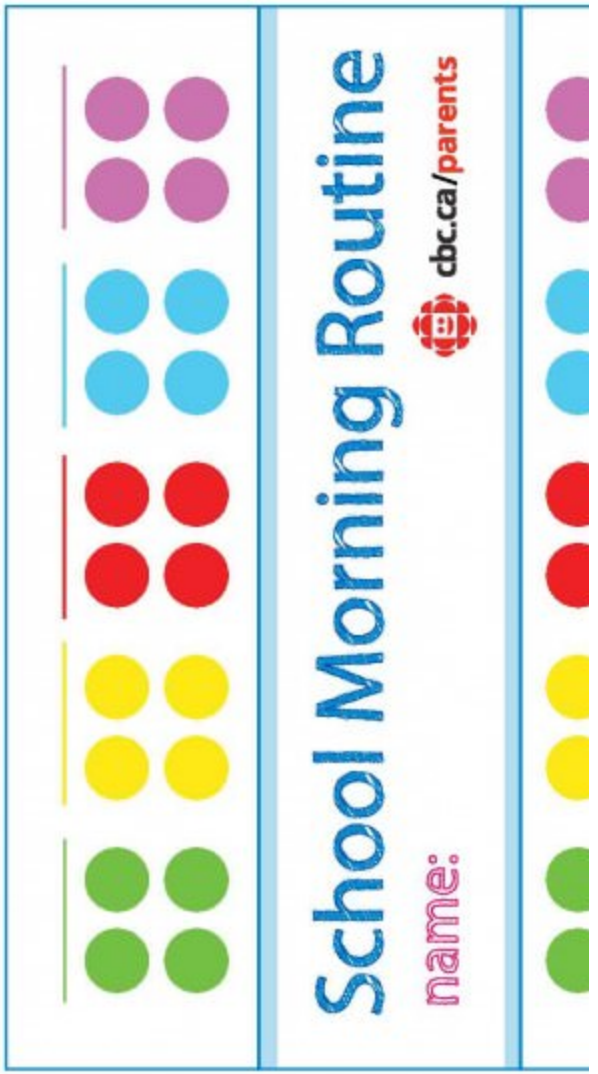
cbc.ca/parents

School Morning Routine

name:

cbc.ca/parents





School Morning Routine

cbc.ca/parents

name:

Before you leave your child at school, have a special handshake that you and your child use. Remind her that you will be back in the afternoon!

3. Demonstrate Confidence!

If your child sees that you are upset as well, they are going to think that there is a reason to be upset. Use the following script, "Your teacher is going to take good care of you. I will be back because I love you. I will always come back".

4. Create a social storybook.

This is a great idea that can be used for just about anything that causes your child anxiety (e.g. going to school, going to a neighbor's house, joining in with friends, going to the dentist, playing a sport). Creating a storybook is simple: on each page put a different step to the upcoming event and talk about it. You can do this on your own or use one of the several Apps that are available to create a digital storybook (*Story Maker for Social Stories* – $39.99).

5. Limit the activities that your child does in a day.

If your child is acting out, she may feel over-scheduled and tired. When children are tired or hungry they have a difficult time doing too many things. The "fun activity" then turns into a stressful situation. Your child's tolerance is going to be low, so if she is playing with a friend or attending an activity she is most likely going to tantrum, or have difficulty taking turns and sharing.

6. Talk about what will happen when you get to the new activity.

This will help your child to feel better about the situation. Just showing that you understand will make all of the difference. For example, "When we get to gym class you can sit with me for the first few moments. You do not have to participate until you are ready. When you are ready, give me a signal." (This can be something special that you both make up, like squeezing your hand or touching your shoulder). This can be applied to any new or existing experience that your child may have difficulty attending.

7. Bring a snack or favorite toy with you.

This is a good idea for when you go on outings or when you pick up your child from school or daycare. Let your child know that you have this item in the car before you leave him. This helps your little one to anticipate your return. The best option to bring after a long day at school or daycare is a small snack (cheese stick, apple slices, peanut butter crackers). Your child will be hungry after such a busy day and less tolerant of the transition to home.

8. Send messages that help your child feel good about himself.

Messages such as: “Change is difficult for you.”/ “ I know you like to know what to expect before you have to do it.”/ “Whenever I can, I will help you with this. Unfortunatel, there are times that I cannot, but I know you can learn to be flexible.”

9. Read children’s books about separation.

Talk about the characters in the book and how they overcome their fears. We have provided a list of suggestions of books for children about separation anxiety below. You may have others that you like better. It is good to read these books with your child to help validate anxious feelings as well as see how separations can be handled in a loving way.

– *I Don’t Want to Go to School: Helping Children Cope with Separation Anxiety* by Nancy Pando and Kathy Voerg (New Horizon Press, 2005, ages 4-8)

– *The Kissing Hand* by Audrey Penn (Tanglewood Press, 2006, ages 4-8)

– *Llama Llama Misses Mama* by Anna Dewdney (Viking Juvenile, 2009, ages 4-8)

– *Mommy, Don’t Go* by Elizabeth Crary and Marina Megale (Parenting Press, Inc., 1996, ages 4-8)

Resources:

The No-Cry Separation Anxiety Solution, by Elizabeth Pantley (Better Beginnings, 2010)

Raising Your Spirited Child, by Mary –Sheedy Kurcinka

www.ahaparenting.com

www.cbc.ca/parents