**Preparing Your Child for Child Care** Wendy Sue Swanson, MD, MBE, FAAP

[**http://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/toddler/Pages/Soothing-Your-Childs-Separation-Anxiety.aspx**](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/toddler/Pages/Soothing-Your-Childs-Separation-Anxiety.aspx)



Article Body

​Most infants, up to 7 months of age, adjust well to good child care. Older infants may get upset when left with strangers. They will need extra time and your support to get to know the caregiver and to understand that you will pick them up at the end of the day. Starting new child care is often harder on the parents than it is on the child.

Being prepared makes any new experience easier. You can help your child adjust to a new child care arrangement. Try the following:

* Arrange a visit with in-home caregivers while you are at home or when you need child care for a short time.
* Visit the center or home with your child before beginning care. Show your child that you like and trust the caregiver.
* Check with the caregiver or center staff about the best time of the month or year for children to begin attending the program.
* Allow your child to carry a reminder of home to child care. A family photograph or small toy can be helpful.
* Talk with your child about child care and the caregiver.
* Read books about child care. (Check with your local library.)

Sudden changes in caregivers may be upsetting to a child. This can happen even if the new caregiver is kind and competent. You may want to arrange a meeting with the new caregiver or ask your child's doctor for advice. Parents need to help caregivers and the child deal with any changes in the child's routine at home or child care.

# How to Ease Your Child’s Separation Anxiety



Article Body

Separation anxiety varies WIDELY between children. Some babies become hysterical when mom is out of sight for a very short time, while other children seem to demonstrate ongoing anxiety at separations during infancy, toddlerhood, and preschool.

## To All You Working Moms & Dads

The trick for surviving separation anxiety demands [preparation](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/work-play/Pages/Preparing-Your-Child-for-Child-Care.aspx), brisk transitions, and the evolution of time. I would suggest we parents suffer as much as our children do when we [leave](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/work-play/Pages/Making-Drop-Off-at-Childcare-Easier.aspx). Even though we are often reminded that our children stop crying within minutes of our leave-taking, how many of you have felt like you’re “doing it all wrong” when your child clings to your legs, sobs for you to stay, and mourns the parting?

As a [working mom](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/work-play/Pages/Working-Mothers.aspx), separation anxiety creates questions for me. Although it is an entirely normal behavior and a beautiful sign of a meaningful attachment, separation anxiety can be exquisitely unsettling for us all.

**Here are facts about separation anxiety and tips to improve the transitions I’ve learned the hard way (I’ve made about every mistake):**

## Facts about Separation Anxiety

* **Infants**: Separation anxiety develops after a child gains an understanding of object permanence. Once your infant realizes you’re really gone (when you are), it may leave him unsettled. Although some babies display object permanence and separation anxiety as early as 4 to 5 months of age, most develop more robust separation anxiety at around 9 months. The leave- taking can be worse if your infant is hungry, tired, or not feeling well. Keep transitions short and routine if it’s a tough day.
* **Toddlers**: Many toddlers skip separation anxiety in infancy and start demonstrating challenges at 15 or 18 months of age. Separations are more difficult when children are hungry, tired, or sick—which is most of toddlerhood! As children develop independence during toddlerhood, they may become even more aware of separations. Their behaviors at separations will be loud, tearful, and difficult to stop.
* **Preschoolers**: By the time children are 3 years of age, most clearly understand the effect their anxiety or pleas at separation have on us. It doesn’t mean they aren’t stressed, but they certainly are vying for a change. Be consistent; don’t return to the room based on a child’s plea, and certainly don’t cancel plans based on separation anxiety. Your ongoing consistency, explanations, and diligence to return when you say you will are tantamount.

## How to Survive Separation Anxiety

* **Create quick good-bye rituals**. Even if you have to do major-league- baseball–style hand movements, give triple kisses at the cubby, or provide a special blanket or toy as you leave, keep the good-bye short and sweet. If you linger, the transition time does too. So will the anxiety.
* **Be consistent**. Try to do the same drop-off with the same ritual at the same time each day you separate to avoid unexpected factors whenever you can. A routine can diminish the heartache and will allow your child to simultaneously build trust in her independence and in you.
* **Attention**: When separating, give your child full attention, be loving, and provide affection. Then say good-bye quickly despite her antics or cries for you to stay.
* **Keep your promise**. You’ll build trust and independence as your child becomes confident in her ability to be without you when you stick to your promise of return. The biggest mistake I ever made in this regard was returning to class to “visit” my son about an hour after a terrible transition. I was missing him, and although the return was well intended, I not only extended the separation anxiety, we started all over again in the process. When I left the second time (and subsequent days) it was near nuclear.
* **Be specific, child style**. When you discuss your return, provide specifics that your child understands. If you know you’ll be back by 3:00 pm, tell it to your child on his terms; for example, say, “I’ll be back after nap time and before afternoon snack.” Define time he can understand. Talk about your return from a business trip in terms of “sleeps.” Instead of saying, “I’ll be home in 3 days,” say, “I’ll be home after 3 sleeps.”
* **Practice being apart**. Ship the children off to [grandma’s](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/work-play/Pages/A-Message-for-Grandparents-Who-Provide-Childcare.aspx) home, schedule playdates, allow friends and family to provide child care for you (even for an hour) on the weekend. Before starting child care or preschool, practice going to school and your good-bye ritual before you even have to part ways. Give your child a chance to prepare, experience, and thrive in your absence!

It’s rare that separation anxiety persists on a daily basis after the preschool years. If you’re concerned that your child isn’t adapting to being without you, chat with the pediatrician. Your pediatrician has certainly helped support families in the same situation and can help calm your unease and determine a plan to support both of you!

# Working Mothers



Article Body

​In the United States today, more than half of mothers with young children work, compared to about one third in the 1970s. Working mothers are now the rule rather than the exception. Women have been moving into the workforce not only for career satisfaction but also because they and their families need the income.

## Why Women Work

In many families today, mothers continue to work because they have careers that they have spent years developing. Some women return to work soon after giving birth because they know that most employers in this country are not sympathetic to working mothers who wish to take time off to be with their young children. If these women stop working, even for several months, they may give up some of the advantages they have earned or risk losing certain career opportunities.

## Help From Others

As a greater number of women enter the workforce and stay there, more and more children are cared for by adults other than their parents. Relatives sometimes take on child care duties, or children are cared for in a variety of child care settings. Not surprisingly, working mothers are more likely to have their infants and toddlers in an out-of-the- home child care center than nonemployed mothers. However, most three- to five-year-olds are in center-based or preschool programs regardless of whether their mother works outside the home. Parents all want their children to have the best possible start in school, so they are likely to enroll their three- and four-year-olds in a program.

## How It Can Impact Your Child

Some people still think that a “good mother” is one who gives up work to stay home with her children. However, no scientific evidence says children are harmed when their mothers work. A child’s development is influenced more by the emotional health of the family, how the family feels about the mother’s working, and the quality of child care. A child who is emotionally well adjusted, well loved, and well cared for will thrive regardless of whether the mother works outside the home.

A mother who successfully manages both an outside job and parenthood provides a role model for her child. In most families with working mothers, each person plays a more active role in the household. The children tend to look after one another and help in other ways. The father is more likely to help with household chores and child rearing as well as breadwinning. These positive outcomes are most likely when the working mother feels valued and supported by family, friends, and coworkers.

## Conflicts

Problems can arise if a woman does not want to work or if her husband does not want her to work. If a woman works because she needs the money, she may have to take a job that she does not like. In that case, she needs to be careful not to bring her frustration and unhappiness home, where it will spill over into family relationships. The message the children may receive in this situation is that work is unpleasant and damages instead of builds self-esteem.

Family relationships may suffer if both parents want to work but only one has a job. Problems also can occur if there is competition or resentment because one parent is earning more money than the other. Such conflicts can strain the marriage and may make the children feel threatened and insecure. With both parents working, the need for mutual support and communication is even more important.

## Family Time

Even when there are no problems, however, a two-career family has to deal with issues that do not come up in other families. Parents may feel so divided between family and career that they have little time for a social life or each other. Both parents need to share household and child care responsibilities so that one will not end up doing most of the work and feeling resentful. Parents will lose an average of about ten work days per year due to the need to tend to a sick child, to care for their child when child care arrangements have broken down, or to take their child to necessary appointments.

## When to Return to Work

A woman’s decision to return to work must take into account her own needs as well as those of her family. If you are considering returning to work, try to delay your return until three or four months after your child is born. Doing this will allow you to get to know your child and let her get to know you.

Take the time to prepare yourself and your family, so that the adjustment is as easy as possible for everyone. Time your return to work so that stress is minimal. If at all possible, avoid having your return coincide with other major family changes, such as moving or changing schools, or personal crises, such as illness or death in the family; arrange trustworthy child care as far in advance as possible.

## Missing Your Child

As a working parent, you are bound to be concerned about the loss of time with your child, especially if he is very young. You may worry that you will miss some of your child’s important milestones, such as his first step or word. You may even feel jealous of the time your child spends with the caregiver. These are all normal feelings. Be aware of them and work to separate your own needs from concerns about your child’s welfare.

The first few years of life are very important in shaping a child’s future personality, but this does not mean that the mother is the only one able to do the shaping. In fact, child care seems to have some important benefits for young children. Youngsters who are routinely cared for by individuals other than their parents may be slightly more independent than other children. A high quality, stimulating, and nurturing child care program also prepares children for school, both socially and intellectually.

## The Importance of Quality Child Care

Parents all wish for the best start for their child. Unfortunately, quality child care can be expensive and often hard to find. Many parents end up spending a large share of their paychecks for child care and still are not happy with the quality of the care their children receive. Lower-income families are much less likely to have their child in a quality center, and are more likely to have multiple changes in their child care arrangements, than middle- to higher-income families.

Finding quality child care is very important. Standards for child care settings may vary depending on the type of child care. Parents can, however, improve their children’s child care programs by becoming actively involved. You can visit the program regularly and talk with the caregiver often and extensively. You also can get involved in fund raising and donating supplies, can volunteer to help, or can work with the staff to create developmentally appropriate activities for the children. It also helps to bring the child’s activities home for family interaction, and on weekends, to try to maintain the child’s weekday schedule.

Taking an active role in your child’s care not only helps ensure a child’s well-being, but also may reduce any guilt or misgivings you may feel about working. Having quality child care and a good relationship with the caregiver also can ease some of the worry. Parents need to be especially attentive when they are with their children. The more involved parents are in all aspects of their children’s life—even when they are not physically with their children—the closer they will feel and the more effective they will be as parents.