

Separation Anxiety Disorder

Besides seeking professional help, other helpful strategies to consider:

- When your child is calm, ask him/her what are his/her worries about being away from you.
- Generate together with your child evidence against his/her feared outcomes of separating from you. Write them down in a pocket card that your child can easily refer to.
- Consider approaching the school counselor or the child's form teacher to inform them that your child may have difficulty separating from you so that arrangements can be made for the teacher/counselor to "take over" the child when he/she steps into school on the first day.
- Say goodbye to your child at the school gate or wherever parents are required to leave their children and tell them specifically where and what time you will be picking them up. Be punctual to pick your child up.
- If your child is allowed to call you during recess, be prepared to take the call. Have a short conversation and assure your child he/she will see you at the waiting area at the specified time.
- Do not allow your child to come home unless he/she is very sick as this may reinforce his/her behavior to report sick whenever he/she feels anxious about school. Your child may rest at the sick bay or General Office until he/she feels better to rejoin the class.
- Be firm about school attendance. Your child may tantrum to avoid going to school. Tell your child firmly but calmly that he/she needs to go to school and bring him/her to school despite resistance.
- In other situations requiring separation, have your child separate from you for increasingly long periods of time. For example, if your child is placed in a childcare or studentcare centre, have your child stay for an hour in the first week, increasing to two hours in the second week and progressing till your child can stay for the entire duration.
- Consider instituting a reward chart ('Brave Chart') together with the counselor/teacher for your child's school/studentcare attendance for the first month. Involve your child by getting him/her to paste the stars, record the points or in deciding rewards.
- Have your child tell you what helped him/her in overcoming anxiety. Acknowledge his/her anxious feelings (ignoring these feelings don't make them go away) but praise your child's efforts at overcoming his/her anxiety.