



## Understanding Separation Anxiety

You may have noticed your baby seems a bit upset lately when separated from you or another caregiver. If not, in the next few months your baby will probably experience some anxiety or sadness when they have to leave you.

### Is this normal?

- This is a phase that most babies go through and is a normal part of development.
- It typically begins around 6 months when crawling begins.
- It can get worse from 12-18 months when your baby begins walking. Your baby realizes he or she can move away from you, but isn't emotionally ready to handle the separation.
- Now babies know you still exist even when they can't see you. The downside is that they worry that when you're gone, you may not come back!

### Things you can do:

- Play peek-a-boo or a hiding game, which teaches your baby that disappearing things do come back.
- Don't leave without saying goodbye. Let your baby see you go and establish a routine when you do. Say something similar each time you leave like, "Mommy's going out, but I'll be back soon!" Your baby will become more upset if he or she feels like you just disappeared.
- Remember that your baby is aware of how you feel, so keep it light and casual when you leave (even if you're feeling upset as well).
- When you return from being out and see your baby for the first time, remind him or her out loud that you've returned ("Daddy's back! I always come back to you.").
- If your baby experiences separation anxiety during a stay at grandma's house, for example, make sure family is aware of this and have fun activities or toys distract your baby when you leave.
- Once you leave, leave. Try not to return, even if you've forgotten something. It will be much harder on your baby to have to deal with the upset of you leaving all over again.
- Give babies time to size up strangers and see your reaction to others. They look to you for clues on how to react. If the stranger seems ok to you, your baby will feel the same.

- Always remember that separation anxiety is part of your baby's normal development, so never apologize if he or she doesn't want to be held or to cuddle up to one of your friends (even to grandma!).

### Nighttime separation anxiety

- Babies may develop some anxiety over being separated from caregivers at night (because they realize that when they can't see you, you're not there).
- Establish a soothing (and regular) bedtime routine (for example, reading, snuggling, singing).
- Sometimes babies start crying for you after you've put them to bed even though they haven't done that for months. Reassure your baby that you are there and soothe him or her verbally for a short amount of time. The key is to be quick! Let your baby know that you'll see them in the morning as you walk out of the room.