

TEXAS Parenting News

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOR PARENTS EVERYWHERE

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Crying when you leave?

The first day in a new school or care setting can often be as difficult for parents as for their children. A child may cry, cling to Mom, or bang on the door as she leaves.

This distress, called "separation anxiety," is normal. It signifies a feeling of abandonment, a sense that Mom or Dad will never come back, or a fear of new people and the unknown.

Learning to cope with this separation is part of growing up. It usually goes away after a week or two.

Ideally, as parents, we prepare our children for entry into a new school. We bring the child to the school in advance and meet the teacher. We show the child around, pointing out the bathrooms and playground. We talk about the new school or caregiver in positive ways: "You'll play with lots of different toys and try new puzzles."

To help reduce the anxiety, consider these tips.

- Stay with your child for a half hour or so the first day or two. Engage the child in an activity, point out fun things to do, and show enthusiasm for the teacher and other children.
- Don't sneak out. Say goodbye and explain that you will return at the end of the day. Express confidence that your child will do fine.
- Offer your child a familiar object to get through the day. It might be the child's "blankey" or teddy bear, your comb or bracelet, or a wallet with a family photo.
- Ignore complaints about a headache or stomachache, excessive crying, and temper tantrums. As long as the child seems healthy, you can leave in good faith.
- If you're worried about how your child is doing, call the caregiver later in the day. Use your judgment about talking to the child on the phone. If your child is playing, talking to you could set off another outburst.

- When you pick up your child, ask what happened during the day. Listen with your full attention. Give positive reinforcement for attending: "You stayed at school the whole day. I know you were scared at times, but you found some fun things to do."

LEARNING TO COPE WITH THIS SEPARATION IS PART OF GROWING UP.

- Look for an opportunity to explain how you faced a similar scary situation as a child. Point out that everyone has to deal with new people and places at times.
- If the anxiety does not improve, visit the school unannounced. If you see no reason for the child's behavior, consult a doctor or counselor.



Take steps to prevent a flu outbreak

Health officials advise that you stay informed and be prepared in the event of a flu pandemic.

A *pandemic* is a global disease outbreak. It occurs when a new flu virus emerges that people have little or no immunity to. Because it's new, there's no vaccine. The disease spreads easily from person to person. It's hard to predict when the next flu pandemic will occur or how bad it will be.

The symptoms of a pandemic flu may be similar to common flu. These include fever, headache, fatigue, dry cough, sore throat, runny nose, and muscle pain. But the symptoms of pandemic flu may be more severe and the complications more serious.

You can help protect your family and community in many ways:

- Insist that all family members practice disease prevention techniques. Wash your hands often. Cover your face while sneezing or coughing. Avoid sharing personal items. Avoid contact with people who are sick.
- Make sure your family's vaccinations are up to date. Ask your doctor about flu and pneumonia shots. A flu shot won't protect you from pandemic flu but is part of a general disease prevention program.
- If your child gets sick, keep the child at home until no longer contagious. Follow your doctor's recommendations for care. Inform your school or center about the child's symptoms so they have accurate data and can make decisions.

THE DISEASE SPREADS EASILY FROM PERSON TO PERSON.

- Be willing to work with your child's school to develop a plan for dealing with a flu outbreak. How will you stay in touch with the school and other parents—through a hot line or telephone tree, email, or radio and TV?
 - Think of a backup plan for child care in the event your school or facility must close. For example, would a relative or neighbor be able to care for your child?
 - If you choose to stay home with your child during an outbreak, plan ways to continue your child's learning. Collect materials like crayons, colored paper, scissors, and stickers in a special box—for use only by a sick child. Stock up on easy-to-prepare food in case you get sick too.
- For more information, see www.pandemicflu.gov/planguide/.



Help children recover from disaster

Many families are still working to recover from the devastating hurricanes of 2005. Whether you were directly affected or indirectly exposed, it's important to recognize that such disasters—and the aftermath—can be frightening to children.

Children's reactions depend to a large extent on their age, how much of the disaster they witnessed, and how they see their parents responding to loss.

To help children cope, experts advise the following:

Suggested books for children

Children's literature can be used to support children in their understandings of natural disasters, including hurricanes. Here's a quick list:

- *Ben's Dream* by Chris Van Allsburg
- *The Big Storm* by Bruce Hiscock
- *Can It Rain Cats and Dogs? Questions and Answers about Weather* by Melvin and Gilda Berger
- *Drip, Drop* by Donald Carrick
- *Flash, Crash, Rumble, and Roll* by Franklyn Branley
- *The Flood That Came to Grandma's House* by Linda Stallone
- *Flood: Wrestling with the Mississippi* by Patricia Lauber
- *Hurricanes: Earth's Mightiest Storms* by Patricia Lauber
- *Lightning* by Seymour Simon
- *Muffel and Plums* by Lilo Fromm
- *Mushroom in the Rain* by Mirra Ginsburg
- *Noah's Ark* by Peter Spier
- *Peter Spier's Rain* by Peter Spier
- *Seasons* by Melvin Berger
- *Silver Pony* by Lynd Ward
- *Storms* by Seymour Simon
- *Summer Across America* by Seymour Simon
- *Sun's Up* by Teryl Euvremer
- *Tornado* by Christopher Lampton
- *Tornado Alert* by Franklyn Branley
- *Up to Ten and Down Again* by Lisa Campbell Ernst
- *Water* by C.S. Vendrell and J.M. Parramon
- *Weather* by Seymour Simon
- *Weather Words and What They Mean* by Gail Gibbon

- Listen to children. Provide a time and place to answer their questions, without forcing them to talk.
- Give children honest answers. Minimizing a danger or loss will not relieve a child's concerns.
- Use words and concepts your child can understand. Don't overload with too much information.
- Be prepared to repeat explanations or have several conversations. If you hear the same question over and over, your child may be seeking reassurance.
- If children have trouble talking, allow them to express themselves in other ways—with toys, artwork, storytelling, or books.
- Let children know how you're feeling. It's OK to express sadness and worry as long as you don't overburden children.
- Limit exposure to TV replays of hurricane devastation and other violence. Young children may think the event is reoccurring. Explain about how one news event can be videotaped and played over and over again.
- Avoid laying blame. Use the opportunity to teach tolerance and compassion.
- Stick to a predictable schedule. Routines help children feel more secure.
- Stay informed about school activities. Talk with your child's teachers about any discussions related to disasters and rebuilding so you can provide support at home.

Behavior changes can indicate stress

A disaster can result in a condition known as Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The disorder may appear soon after the disaster or may not show up for several months or even years later.

PTSD is indicated by changes in behavior. Talk to your pediatrician or family doctor if your child:

- displays persistent fears about a disaster.
- has nightmares, wets the bed, or has other sleep disturbances.
- clings to you or refuses to return to school.
- complains of stomachaches, headaches, or other ailments that have no physical cause.
- misbehaves or acts out in ways not typical for the child.
- withdraws or isolates from family and friends.

Babies differ in temperament

Waiting in the doctor’s office, Angela can’t help but compare her 9-month-old to other infants in the room. Her Marissa jumps up and down in her lap and then squeals to be let down to crawl on the floor.

Another baby sits looking at the book her father is reading to her. Occasionally she points to a page or pats her dad’s face. When he asks if she would like some juice, she happily takes the bottle.

Still another baby clings to his mother neck. He refuses to sit in her lap and cries when anyone looks at him.

“Why can’t my baby be nice like the others?” Angela asks the nurse in the examining room.

“She’s never still, and I get so tired.”

“Babies are born with different temperaments,” says the nurse. “Sometimes the best we can do is accept our child’s personality and adjust as best we can.”



Babies begin showing their different temperaments from the first day they’re born. Parents can be sensitive to these differences and respond with love and consistency.

Distract, substitute, redirect

Babies have short attention spans and little memory. To avoid behavior problems, use one of these techniques:

- **Distract:** Ignacio continues to cry after bumping his head against the sofa, despite your best caresses. Distract him with a squeaky toy or take his hands and play “Pat a Cake.”
- **Substitute:** When Emily and Hannah struggle over a doll, offer one child a different doll or another toy as a substitute.
- **Redirect:** When Ethan starts splashing the water in the toilet, wash his hands and put him in the bathtub to play. Caution: Never leave a child alone around water, even a small amount in a shallow bucket or pan.

Here are some general guidelines:

- Learn your baby’s cries. A baby can have a dozen different cries, each indicating a different need—hungry, wet, cold, hurting, frustrated, or bored, for example. By learning what a particular cry means, you can better satisfy the need and build a sense of security.
- Respond promptly to your baby cries. All babies face a critical social-emotional task between birth and 12 months: developing trust. Letting a baby “cry it out” could make the child cry more, creating a sense of fear and uncertainty.
- Give lots of physical contact. Breastfeeding is ideal. If bottle feeding, hold your baby, not only for safety but also to strengthen the emotional bond. Rock your baby. Stroke your baby’s back while lying in the crib. Hold your baby while reading a story, and offer hugs and kisses during baths and play.
- Anticipate needs. Anticipate, or predict, your baby’s need for food, water, sleep, and diapering for less stress on you both. You anticipate that Joshua will get hungry around noon, for example, so you cut short your Saturday shopping trip and go home around 11:30.
- Babyproof the environment. As babies learn to crawl, they can encounter dangers. Make sure your floor, cabinets, and low furniture are safe. That way, your baby can explore freely without hearing you constantly saying “no.”



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