

How can I STOP my Kindergartner from Crying at Drop-Off?!

QUESTION:

My 3-year-old cries every day when we drop her off at kindergarten. I have talked to her teacher and she tells me, "Rest assured, once you leave she stops crying." But it has been two weeks since school started and it's the same thing every day. Do you have any ideas or suggestions?

ANSWER:

This is an extremely common problem and one that is easily remedied with the passage of time. Going to kindergarten for the first time can be overwhelming for little ones, especially if they are not used to being away from home. It can also be overwhelming for parents, who feel anxious about being separated from their children for such long periods. Here are a few things you can do to make the process easier for her (and yourself!).

FIRST, ensure that your little one is getting adequate sleep each night. Poor sleep can lead to mood swings, behaviour problems and even learning difficulties. According to the research, school-aged children require 10-11 hours of sleep each night, so keep a consistent bedtime routine for your child. In the morning, wake her early enough so that she can get ready for school in a relaxed fashion and enjoy a healthy breakfast. Play a favourite CD in the car on the way to school; allowing your child to choose a few songs may relax her.

SECOND, monitor your own reactions to your child's distress. Children are amazingly perceptive when it comes to their parents' emotions, and your daughter is likely sensing your feelings of concern. This may fuel her anxiety and her desire to stay close to you. Lingering at drop-off time, while understandable, is likely to backfire. It is likely that by delaying your own departure you are reinforcing her tearful behaviour. Your best bet is to give her a quick hug and tell her you'll see her at pick-up time. Then, be on your way. Have a plan to assuage your own nerves, such as calling a trusted friend as you leave school or stopping for a coffee

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12 Tips for handling this Separation Anxiety

1. Be Patient.

While it can be frustrating when someone else says it, the saying, "this too shall pass" is really true. This is merely a stage in your child/family development. It will feel long and arduous when you are in the midst of it, but in years to come it will be just a blip in your child's life. Don't get frustrated with your child. They aren't doing anything wrong. They are just reacting to their natural and normal instincts of desiring to be close to those who protect them.

2. Don't trivialize or demean your child because of separation anxiety.

Statements such as "grow up" or "get over it" or "stop acting like a baby" will only further hurt your child, making them feel more alone and insecure.

3. Watch your own reactions.

If you become nervous or anxious because of your child's behaviour, it can fuel his anxiety. Calmly acknowledge their anxiety and explain that you must leave. Tell him where you are going, reassure your child that you will return and, if possible, let him know when you will return.

4. Let your child know that everyone is nervous on their first day of school.

Many times, children believe they are the only person that feels the fear of going to kindergarten. Your child may feel better knowing he is not the only one who is scared and these feelings are normal.

5. Show confidence in your child.

Even if you are worried about whether your child will have a hard time going off to school, let him know you believe he

will do fine and have fun at school. He will be more willing to believe this if you believe it.

6. Talk about other times your child has managed when you had to go out.

If you have gone shopping or out with your spouse for the evening, remind your child that he got through that time and he will make it through the school day as well.

7. Prepare your Child

Talk about the exciting event of going to Kindergarten, take him/her some times for a pre-visit, go to Parent child mornings to taste together the atmosphere and smooth the day he/she goes alone. Have your child help to pack his back-pack . Keep this time positive, talking about all the fun times he will have at school.

8. Slow Introductions.

If you know in advance that you are going to have to leave your little one at a kindergarten, make sure there is a clear settling in period, where your child and the caregiver can begin to build a relationship. Remember, even if it's Grandma or another relative, the child is still going to prefer you. They are too little to really care that the person with them is family and has good intentions, they just know that it isn't mama(or daddy). Encourage some bonding while you are present to make them still feel secure; but at the same time be clear in you distancing yourself.

9. Don't Be Sneaky.

Remember you are the one who your child trusts, so be honest and open and don't break this trust bond by sneaking away, coz you think he/she does not notice your departure.

Saying "Calm down!", "Don't be afraid!", "You'll be fine!" are not very effective and may make your child more

distressed. Instead, using a calm soothing tone, say "I see that you are having a hard time. We'll work through this together", "Let's see what is in your new classroom.", "Your teacher is over there and looks so happy to see all the children!", "Let's see if we can find your courage." are examples of simple sentences to state over and over. If your child is irritated by hearing these types of verbal encouragements, instead convey your belief in them through your patient body language and steady tone.

10. Don't drag out the good-byes.

While this is hard, you don't want to leave a crying child, dragging it out can increase his anxiety and yours. Give him a hug, a reminder that you believe in him, and reassurance you will be waiting for him when the school day is over.

11. Keep Your Word.

If you tell your toddler that you will be back after their nap, then be back when they wake up. They are too little to understand that Mommy decided to swing into a shop on the way back because of a great sale and got detoured for an extra 30 minutes. They only know that you aren't there when you said that you would be. Of course, there are times when delays are unavoidable, but don't derail your return with frivolous things that can wait until another time.

12. Shower Them with Love, Praise, and Affection.

When you return home, make sure to give lots of comforting hugs and kisses. Let them know that just because you left, doesn't mean you aren't still there for them. If they do well while you are gone, praise their efforts. Positive reinforcement can go a long way and reassurance of your love and presence is an absolute must.

DO's	DON'Ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve the teacher. You need someone on the other end who will greet your child and ease the transition. • Send clear messages. Your child needs to know that you expect him to go to school no matter how much he fusses, cries or stamps his feet. • Believe in your child's ability to make positive changes. • Keep your good-byes short and sweet. In doing so, you convey the message that you have confidence in your child's ability to cope. • Develop loving good-bye routines. We invented a kiss-hug-nose-rub routine that we both enjoy. • Invite children from the class over, so your child can forge friendships that will make the transition easier. • Ask your spouse or another family member to take a turn dropping your child off, or pick up one of your child's classmates on the way to school, and your problems may disappear with lightning speed. • Tuck a family picture or a loving reminder away in your child's backpack for her to look at later in the day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take your child home (or allow him/her to stay at home). If you do, you send the message that if your child cries enough he/she won't have to stay. • Hover around. Your child will sense your anxiety, and this will make it more difficult for him/her to calm down. • Get upset. By keeping an upbeat and positive attitude about your child's school, teacher and friends, you'll help your child feel safe and enjoy his time at school. • Bargain or bribe your child to behave. Your little one should be allowed his/her feelings. • Sneak out. You want your child to know unequivocally that he/she can trust you. • Discuss problems with the teacher in the morning. Save conversations and questions for the end of the day. • Be surprised if you solve the problem and it reoccurs after holidays and sick days.

Remember:

Separation anxiety means that a strong and loving bond exists between you and your child.