

## Separation Anxiety

Understanding how separation anxiety really feels is a great way to understand how to help kids (and parents) feel better.

**1. Parents** -Parents of children who have separation anxiety may also feel anxious. Especially parents whose children are older. They often fear that they will be judged or misunderstood. Understand that if you have never parented a child who has serious anxiety then you may not understand how these parents feel. So do not judge. Do not offer unsolicited advice. Instead be kind, warm, and reassuring. **Then ask these questions:**

1. Would it be better for your child if you stayed for a few minutes or if you left now?
2. What are her favorite activities or comfort items?
3. Does she have any specific fears or triggers that we should know about?
4. If she doesn't settle, when would you like us to page you?

**2. Kids** - Kids - Children who are experiencing separation anxiety may feel alone, lost, and out of control. **Try using the ABC Approach to help.**

**A- Acknowledge** Their Feelings - "I know you are sad. I miss my family too sometimes." This helps a child feel less alone.

**B- Set Boundaries** (Explain Expectations) - "Your mommy and daddy are in the other room. They will be back after we sing and play."

**C- Give a Controlled Choice** - "Would you like to play with bubbles or blocks?" Giving a child two acceptable options gives them some control back.

**If a child does not calm down:** Sometimes kids can be too upset to process things. If this happens, try to guide the child away from walls to decrease the risk of head banging. Make sure that all exits are gated or watched to prevent eloping (running away). Stay with the child until she calms down.

**3. Environment** - Calming the environment often calms the people in it. **Try these:**

Dim lights, turn down the music volume or choose calming music, don't introduce fragrances like air fresheners, scented candles, or other odors. Turn off loud battery operated toys. Offer sensory items like fidgets, rocking chairs, gliders or others.

Most importantly make sure you are calm too.

**Thank you for what you do. Children's ministry matters and so do you!**