

Separation anxiety

- Tearful goodbyes are a normal developmental stage for many toddlers in the first few years of life. If these continue into school this may indicate an anxiety disorder.
- This is more likely to occur if there are major changes for the child such as a house move a new sibling or conflict at home.
- If a child is settled in the school then separation anxiety develops, this is normally due to something stressful happening for the young person, perhaps bullying or parental illness and so on
- A small proportion of children develop separation anxiety disorder. They fear losing their parents or being lost themselves. This can lead to panic attacks before the parent leaves such as shortness of breath, hyperventilating, being sick. They may have nightmares about being separated from their parent. They may worry excessively about being kidnapped or something bad happening to their parent and need excessive reassurance.
- To help this child in the classroom:
 - Speak to the parents that is normal for them to feel a variety of emotions when leaving an upset child but if they keep returning to the room, they reinforce the behaviours. They need to keep calm and keep walking.
 - Let the child know each day what to expect the next morning in the classroom
 - Arrange for a familiar person to meet the child at school in the morning at drop off time
 - Find out about the child's interests and provide distraction relating to this interest as soon as they enter the classroom
 - Have a special project for the parent they work on when they come into the classroom each morning.
 - Consider them sitting drawing a picture of their parent picking them up at the end of the day

If you are concerned this is not settling and is outside of the normal range. Gather as much information as possible eg how does the child normally cope with change and transitions. How often do the parents leave the child elsewhere? What are the home circumstances, is everyone well at home? Consider asking the family to complete an SDQ and talk with them about going to see their GP to consider referral to a specialist. Often these issues can be resolved swiftly with Psychiatric input or psychological therapies such as family therapy.