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Separation Anxiety

One of the earliest and worst pangs of guilt a parent will experience, especially a new parent, is during their child's bouts with separation anxiety. It can start as early as 7 months and according to child development experts, is both normal and healthy. Healthy you ask? Separation anxiety, they agree, is a developmental milestone. Toddlers may be ready to take on a little independence, but think how scary that is.

"Separation anxiety is completely normal and rational. Really, it is. It makes perfect sense," says 2012 Minnesota Teacher of the Year Kathy Smith. What she doesn't want you to say as you bid goodbye to your sobbing, clinging child is "Mommy's going to miss you too." If you do, the award-winning preschool teacher says you'll have a kid who is losing it all morning. "Even if you don't believe it say 'you're going to be fine. You're going to have a fantastic day with your friends at school'. They look to us, like 'how should I be feeling about this?'"

Cathy Southerland manages The Children's Museum of Indianapolis Preschool. She helps parents through those traumatic times by providing the following advice:

- Prepare your child for preschool by taking him for a visit before the first day of class. Make an appointment and to meet the teacher. Explore the facility together and be sure to show the fun activities that will follow.
- Be honest with your child. Explain what will happen when you leave your child at preschool or with a family member or friend.
- Assure your child you will be back to pick him up. Tell him what time. Be on time.
- Keep your goodbye consistent every day. Keep it fairly short. Make it loving. Make it meaningful and then walk away.
- Trust that if you've picked a quality child-care facility, the care-givers will quickly distract and engage your child in activities.

The truth is, says Southerland, separation anxiety meltdowns probably will be harder on you than on your child. Stay Strong!