Preparing Your Child to Help Deal with Separation Anxiety

It can happen when a child starts Kindergarten, Childcare, Prep and during the early years of school. It’s all about your child trying to hold on to what is safe and familiar when they’re faced with a new and unfamiliar situation. If the first separations are managed well, it helps children with the separations they’ll have to deal with through their lives. It can be a difficult time, for both parents and children and can last for several weeks.

So here are some hints to make that first separation a little easier.

**Prepare your child**

- Discuss with your child what is going to happen, before it happens. Give them a sense of what to expect and be positive about it.
- Give them some responsibility to distract them. Buy them a new bag. Let them help pack their lunchbox and bag so they feel more in control and don’t just feel things are happening to them.
- Take them for a tour of their new school, kindergarten or childcare centre.
- Let them wear their new uniform during the holidays so they can get used to how they look in it. Tell them how great they look in it.
Minimise those teary goodbyes

- **Stay Calm.** A parent’s calm and happy state of mind in this situation, and their clear communication to the child about what’s going to happen, have the greatest impact on lessening separation anxiety. Some parents make the mistake of telling their child ‘I know you’re going to miss Mummy and I’ll miss you, too…’, but don’t add to their fear. So as you say goodbye get down on the same level as your child, keep a calm tone of voice, explain what’s going to happen next, and then leave.

- **Stick to the plan.** As your pride and joy clings to you, you’ll reinforce the anxious behaviour if you give in to them. It’s not easy to walk away but if you surrender your child learns that tears or tantrums will mean they stay with you.