

# When Letting Go Becomes Difficult

By Abbey Grace Yap

As a kid, were you afraid of being left alone by your mom or dad in school? Does your child throw tantrums when you leave them with someone else? Your kid might be showing signs of separation anxiety, just like you did when you were a child. Do you have an intense fear of being left by anybody you love? Do you feel intensely distressed when you lose something you like? You might be suffering from separation anxiety disorder. How does one differentiate separation anxiety from separation anxiety disorder?

Separation anxiety is a fairly common anxiety disorder that commonly affects children and young adolescents. It is a normal developmental stage that children go through when separated from their primary caregiver, like their parents or their nannies. When a child fails to outgrow his separation anxiety, it becomes separation anxiety disorder. Children with separation anxiety show it by crying, manifesting clinginess, shyness, silence, and unwillingness to interact with other people, even those to whom he is already familiar with.

Separation anxiety disorder is a psychological condition in which an individual has excessive anxiety regarding separation from home or from people to whom the individual has a strong emotional attachment (like a mother). This psychological condition affects seven percent of the adult population, and only four percent of the child population. Separation anxiety disorder manifests itself with: recurring distress when separated from a person or object of attachment, like the mother or the home); a persistent, excessive worrying about losing the subject of attachment; a persistent, excessive worrying that an event may occur which may lead to the separation from or loss of a subject of attachment; an unfounded fear of being alone without the subject of attachment; a persistent reluctance or refusal to sleep without being near a major attachment figure; or having recurring nightmares about separation.

A big differentiating factor with separation anxiety and separation anxiety disorder is that the former is temporary and is a necessary part of growing. It is essential for the child's normal growth and development. The latter is far worse as it fails to get past the transition period and remains clingy and too attached which may prove to be detrimental and may affect the way a normal child or person functions.

Separation anxiety disorder may be triggered by traumatic experiences such as:

I A frightening experience that the child personally experiences or have heard about. (ex. earthquakes, stories of child abduction)

I A serious separation experience. (ex. parents divorce or parents serve in the military)

I Severely stressful experience within the family. (ex. a pending divorce, serious illness or death, starting over at a new school)

I A significant change that the child experiences. (changing nannies, having a new brother or sister, starting at a new school)

I An illness, be it major or minor conditions.

There's a fine line that determines whether your child is experiencing normal separation anxiety or if he's crossed over to having separation anxiety disorder. It is best to keep yourself informed about the differences between simple separation anxiety and the disorder to be able to keep track of your child and seek help if needed.

The writer, Abbey Grace Yap, is an active advocate for health consciousness and disease awareness. She possesses a deep passion in discovering new health-related information and sharing it to her readers.

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