

Easy Separation

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Our animated video aligns with IHDCYH's mandate of promoting positive mental health and ensuring positive outcomes in children and youth. "Easy Separation" empowers parents and caregivers to help their children face new situations by focusing on the critical transition from home to school. Our video illustrates how parents can encourage more successful separations by exuding confidence, keeping a warm tone of voice, and calmly acknowledging their child's worries rather than accommodating the anxiety (Masi, Mucci, & Millepiedi, 2001). Caregivers are key to making separations easier for children at this sensitive age, establishing the "Healthy Foundation of Life".

Worries about separating from caregivers is normal in young children; worries typically decrease as a child ages. However, up to 5% of elementary school-aged children will continue to have extreme distress, or *separation anxiety*, when separating from their parents (Breton et al., 1999). Separation issues can be a significant stressor for caregivers, and particularly problematic at school entry (Masi et al., 2001). Beginning school can increase sensitivity to separation from parents, and for some, this sensitivity may be overwhelming for both the child and parent. Unaddressed separation anxiety can develop into school refusal and contribute to children missing out on important developmental tasks and opportunities (King & Bernstein, 2001). Separation difficulties are also a risk factor for developing other impairing anxiety disorders later in life (Masi et al., 2001) or other mental health problems. However, more 'instinctual' or automatic responses to a child's distress (i.e. always letting the child take the lead on what he or she can handle) may actually make behaviours worse over time.

In developing the script (available in English and Mandarin), we synthesized current knowledge on separation anxiety in young children, and also consulted with veteran kindergarten teachers who provided reliable, practical, and parent-friendly background information.

References

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