

# Separation Anxiety Disorder

Separation Anxiety Disorder is intense worry over being away from a loved one. Children with separation anxiety disorder worry that something bad will happen to their loved one, usually a parent, and can become upset, fearful, or feel sick when they have to be apart from their parent. This can make it hard for the child to go to school or out with friends, or for the parent to leave for work or travel.

## What does it look like?

Separation Anxiety Disorder may arise after a stressor like the death or illness of a loved one, changing schools, parental divorce, or other events involving separation.

Separation Anxiety Disorder typically begins between preschoolage and childhood, rarely in adolescence. It is estimated that 4% of children experience Separation Anxiety Disorder.

## How can I help myself?

### Practice makes perfect!



Little steps get you where you want to go. It's like learning to ride a bike. It may be scary at first but you learn, and then you can do things other kids your age can do.

### Reframe your brain!



Try thinking of the fun things you can do when you go to a friend's house without your parent. Or think about having a nice time with your parent when you all get back home later in the day.



Scan the code for additional information

## How can my parents help me?

### Help me set goals.

It's best to work on one thing at a time, like going to sleep by myself or being in the house while my parent does an errand. We can pick 1 thing and work on it in steps.

### Make it worth the work!

This is hard work. My parents can set up little rewards, like we can go out for ice cream on Saturday if I practice staying in my bed on my own each night this week.

### Change the questions.

Kids with separation anxiety often ask their parents questions over and over, trying to be sure their parents are ok. Parents get tired, and the questions never stop! If I keep calling my mom to be sure she won't get in a car accident, she can't focus on driving. My mom can tell me: "I won't answer any questions about car accidents. But you can ask me what's for dinner!".

## How can a professional help?

**Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)** can help you and your family work on controlling anxious thoughts and actions.

In CBT, you practice doing the things that make you nervous, so that little by little, the fear goes away. Parents of kids with separation anxiety don't like to see their kids frightened or upset, so CBT can help your parents stay calm and work with you on facing your fears.