

Easing Your Child's Separation Anxiety

Keep in mind the following points to promote a smooth transition for your child's new school experience.

1. *It's normal for a child to cry and take time adjusting to school.*

It's healthy for a child to express sadness over being separated from you. Young children don't have emotional control yet, so they will cry when they feel sad. It doesn't reflect badly on your child or you! There are different patterns we see, and all are normal:

- Child may cry hard right away. Most often, this kind of reaction subsides within minutes of parents leaving.
- Child might be fine for first day or so but melt down and protest after the newness has worn off. Sometimes, child is still sad for a while after you leave and cries a little in class. By getting absorbed in the activities in the room and connecting with her teacher or another student, child forgets to be sad!
- Child might not cry, but is clingier than usual or shows general uneasiness about going to school. He's getting used to being separated from you for long periods and being in a new environment.

2. *At LePort, we are proactive toward helping your child have a smooth transition by connecting him to his new environment and to the people he will be with every day at school.*

Inside LePort classrooms, we balance a sympathetic response with getting your child involved.

- We ask that you say your goodbyes on the classroom threshold. This is important because it sends the message right from the start that you are not going to be with your child while at school. A teacher or assistant will be standing close by to help guide your child into the classroom.
- We acknowledge your child's feelings and help soothe him (hold his hand, hug him, have him sit in a lap) for a certain period. If he continues to cry, we will check back with him regularly, but gradually ease off the offer of physical comforts to help him get used to comforting himself.
- We get your child past the tears by actively getting her involved. We tailor our approach to your child: a teacher may stay close to her; she may pair her up with an older child; she may invite her to work with an intriguing, accessible Montessori activity; she may read him a comforting book; she may show your child the snack routine. Especially with our youngest ones, distraction can be a very effective tool for easing a tough separation.

On the school community level, we provide many opportunities to connect you and your child with the school, and encourage you to participate. Some examples include:

- **Visitation Day (during the first week of school):** a chance for your child to get oriented to his classroom with you at his side, to meet his teacher and other students, in the days leading up to the start of school.
- **Back-to-school Family Social (right as school starts for the new school year):** This is a fun way to connect with the greater LePort school community, as well as a chance for your child to show you around his new classroom environment. It happens during the first week of classes, and you don't want to miss it!
- **Ongoing Communication:** Be on the lookout for email and phone updates on how your child is doing, new activities she's trying out, a favorite Montessori material she chooses to return to, etc. *Always* feel free to reach out to us if you have questions or concerns!
- **Class Composite:** Along with your child's school photo (taken in October), he will receive a class composite—a page with the picture & name of every child in his class as well as his teachers. Put this somewhere prominent at home (on the fridge, your child's bedside table) because it can serve as a helpful way to connect school with home, by naming his classmates, talking about special friends and things he does at school.
- **School directory:** We offer families the chance to be included in the school directory. This helps facilitate play dates and other informal contacts between classmates, which can be tremendously useful in helping children find new friends more quickly and feeling connected to their new community.
- ***There's a lot that you can do to ease your child's separation anxiety.***

Prepare your child in advance. Talk in simple terms about what you'll do at drop-off and how it will go. Come up with and stick to a consistent, loving, but short good-bye routine that works for your family. E.g. child pretends to push parent out of door; pattern of hug-kiss-hug; funny rhymes (See you later, alligator. Take care, polar bear...)

Show confidence—in your child and in the school you've chosen for him. An upbeat goodbye with a smile on your face makes a BIG difference. Of course, if you have *any* concerns or would like a call later in the day, please talk to our front office staff on your way out!

Read books with your child about dealing with separation anxiety as a springboard for talking about his feelings, about how it's normal to feel that way, about how he'll get through it. See the list of recommended books below.

Get connected with the LePort community so that you and your child build social contacts.

Become knowledgeable about what goes on at school by attending parent education evenings and watching LePort Schools' videos on YouTube. It really helps if you understand what your child experiences in class: many young children have a hard time communicating about their experiences, and it will be much easier for you to understand what your child is talking about if you have the context that these materials provide.

You can find the videos on our web site, or directly on YouTube here:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/LePortSchools>

Help us help you by keeping us informed of family circumstances that affect your child, so we can help her cope, whether it is a joyous event like a new baby or a more challenging one like an illness or death in the family. Separation anxiety, even when initially conquered, can reappear if a child has other stresses in life, and we want to make sure we can help.

Recommended Reading

Oh My Baby, Little One—Kathi Appelt

Llama Llama Misses Mama—Anna Dewdney

I Love You All Day Long—Francesca Rusackas

The Kissing Hand—Audrey Penn

The Invisible String—Patrice Karst

I Don't Want to Go to School: Helping Children Cope with Separation Anxiety—Nancy Pando