

Managing Challenging Childhood Behaviours

Managing the behaviours in a young child can be challenging and exhausting for parents. Every child is different as a result what works for one child does not necessarily work for another. Parents also have their own unique personalities and this may make it a challenge to manage their child's budding personality if it is different to theirs, or maybe more so if its the same. Parents also have the additional responsibilities such as work, other children, relationships with partners, and it can be difficult to find time for their own basic needs to be met. Challenging childhood behaviours can make parenting seem quite overwhelming, but there are some tips that can help parents to manage them with less stress for both parent and child.

Separation Anxiety



Separation anxiety is a normal developmental stage that starts between age 6 - 12 months and can peak between age 10 -12 months. It is usually gone by age 3 years, but can continue beyond. It occurs as children explore new experiences and environments like going to school for the first time. It is often accompanied by a fear of strangers. Very young infants do not show signs of separation anxiety, and it may seem strange to parents when their child who was quite happy to be held by anyone starts to become clingy or tearful when left alone or given to someone with whom they are unfamiliar. This behaviour is normal, and its onset coincides with the age at which babies realise their dependence on and safety with their primary caregivers. It signals that they feel safe with the small group who care for them, and unsafe with new people or environments. The tearfulness can be distressing to caregivers especially when they must leave. It is important to help little ones safely over this hurdle, teaching them that some separation is both necessary and helpful, while not all strangers should be trusted without question. Learning about separation and safety is needed for your baby to develop a sense of independence while remaining safe.

Practice separation for brief periods: leaving baby with a trusted caregiver for short periods like when you shower, go for a walk, or make a short trip to the supermarket. Shorter absences can help your baby (and you) to prepare for longer ones like preschool and primary school.

Be consistent: if at all possible, separations should be planned, so that infants can learn that separation happens but also ends around particular times. This includes a routine for leaving as well as picking up your infant from another caregiver. Uncertainty can heighten anxiety, so having structure and routine is important. Obviously, not all absences/separations can be planned, but wherever possible, stick to a routine.

Talk to your child: even children who cannot yet speak benefit from calming words from a parent. Talk to your child about your leaving and also tell them that you will be back and when. Make saying goodbye a positive thing, emphasising the opportunity for learning and play that they will have while you are away, and assure them of your return.

Make plans for later: speaking of the future, making plans with your child about what will happen when you are together again reinforces to them that you are indeed coming back and also gives them something to look forward to.

Leave a comforting object: for younger children a blanket or favourite toy (a transitional object) can provide comfort for them when you are away. As they mature, they will need such things less and less, but it is important to recognise that separation from a parent can be challenging for them, and allow them something that they find comforting.

