



Helping Hands Christian Learning Center

"Let Us Make a Difference in Your Child's Life"

Separation Anxiety

Around seven or eight months, babies may show separation anxiety where they display distress when a beloved caregiver leaves their sight. This is related to a change in the baby's relationship to his parents. No longer content to just have his needs satisfied, he has become enormously attached to those individuals who have met those needs.

This indication of true attachment is as intense as a first love affair, and even though expressed with loud cries and distress, is really a sign to be celebrated. All the hard work of parenting a young infant has resulted in this strong feeling of love. At this stage of attachment, the baby experiences the parent's disappearance or absence as a loss. With a shaky new sense of object permanence, he may fear that when his mother or father go away, they're never coming back.

This clinginess may be upsetting to some parents unless they understand its origin in attachment and limited understanding. Over time, with repeated parting and return, the baby comes to understand the process of being apart, and becomes calmer about this process. Parents need to be gentle in their understanding of the baby's strong feelings, and unhesitating in their clear leaving and return.

A related anxiety may occur in some infants at about the same time. This is stranger anxiety, protesting when less familiar faces come too close. Not to be interpreted as sudden shyness that must be combated, instead evidently by this age the baby has learned to distinguish his own people, and feels less comfortable with others.

Again, gentle understanding and not forcing the issue at this point are the appropriate responses.

With time, both separation and stranger anxiety lessen, occasionally reappearing during the toddler years.

