

## Helping Young Children with Separation Anxiety

One indicator of the development of healthy attachment is the reluctance to be separated from one's caregiver. This is a normal, healthy response in young children and, in most cases, this anxiety stops within minutes after the parent leaves. Children may display increased separation anxiety if they are:

- Tired or unwell
- Have experienced changes in their routine/family (new sibling, new home, divorce, etc.).

At these times it is normal and healthy for the child to be reluctant to let their caregiver leave them. Take these factors into account and consider what action is best for both of you.

- Although parents are not the cause of separation anxiety, their behaviour can greatly influence the outcome. Some tips for helping your child adjust to a new situation:
- When beginning something new, keep the initial periods of separation short. Stay with your child until you feel they are familiar and comfortable with new people and surroundings.
- Be predictable. Tell your child when you are going and when you will return, then do what you have told them you will do.
- Always tell your child when you are leaving, even if you are afraid it will make her/him cry.
- Don't prolong your departure or come back after you have said good-bye.
- Let your child know that you understand how upset they are. Never make fun of his/her distress or scold the child for it.
- Never bribe a child. If you make plans for a special outing to encourage the transition out of school, then make those plans unconditional.
- Arrange play dates so that your child can get to know other children in his/her class better.

As early childhood educators, we are well experienced in helping children and parents to build healthy periods of time apart from each other. Keep the teachers well informed of your concerns and your intentions. We are here to help in whatever way we can.

Remember, at the Bowen Children's Centre:

- *We will never leave your child to cry on his/her own.*
- *We will call you if your child remains upset for more than a few minutes.*
- *You are welcome to stay. This is your Centre, too.*