

HELPING YOUR CHILD THROUGH SEPARATION ANXIETY



It's normal for children to show distress, anger, and sadness when separated from their primary caregiver within the early childhood years (0-5 years). In fact, the appearance of separation anxiety often emerges around a child's first birthday. Although this is a normal difficulty that many children experience, it is nonetheless unsettling for all parties involved - the child, parent, and other caregiver/adults. In fact, many parents go through extremely difficult emotions similar to their child's distress when separating. However, it is important to manage this distress effectively to allow your child to make gains in the areas of independence and trust.

Tips that may help your child deal with separation anxiety at dance class:

Talk with the teacher to develop a plan that will increase your confidence and ease your child's difficulty with saying goodbye. Reward your child for brave and independent behavior.

Be aware of the timing of goodbyes. Children are more likely to display unsettling reactions such as tantrums, yelling, crying, and screaming when they are tired, hungry, or restless. Try to schedule your dance class around their regular meal, snack, and nap times.

When saying goodbye to your little one, remember to be calm and consistent. Remember if you show distress, your child's discomfort will likely increase. One way to improve your consistency is to create a goodbye ritual—let them know where you will be while they are in class and where you will be when they are done with class. Once you say your goodbye it is time to leave. If you linger or come back to check you will create more distress on your child, as they will be more uncertain about your separation. Parents should give a clear goodbye and let the child know where they will be waiting for them after the class is over. Parents should then go station themselves in one spot as the child enters their classroom. The parent should be stationed in the same spot when the class is over so the child knows right where to find them. Some dancers might handle the separation better if they cannot see the parent or caregiver from the viewing windows - each child is unique.

Children should stay in class for 5 minutes. If they are still upset they will be brought back out to the parent after 5 minutes. After 5 more minutes, the teacher will come back to check if the dancer is ready to join the class. Parents should not knock, open the door or come into the classroom to check on the child or to send them back to class. If the child still continues to cry and a parent must come in, the parent should sit quietly and let their child watch until they are ready to join. Parents should sit still with limited movement so as not to disrupt the class.

Parents whose child is struggling with separation anxiety should not leave the studio during class time and should make sure that they are stationed in the same spot when the child comes out of class.

When it comes to say goodbye, connect with the teacher or assistant. It may be best for the teacher or assistant to make physical contact, such as holding your child in their arms or holding hands with your child. Reassure your child that the teacher will take good care of them while you are gone.

Be sure to return when you say you are going to return and don't be late.

Work with your child's teacher on ideas for positive reward of brave behavior!

