

# SEPARATION IS HARD

While separation can't always be avoided, the negative effects of emotional upset that are often caused by separation can be. Below are tips and prompts to help you and your child prepare for and recover from emotional upsets caused by separation.

## Before You Separate

**Make some extra time in the morning to cuddle and emotionally connect.**

- Cuddle up in bed or another comfortable place where you can be one-on-one.
- Talk about how leaving them makes you feel. Here are some phrases to help express your feelings to your child:
  - It makes me so sad when I have to leave you.
  - I always think about you when we have to be apart.
  - I am always eager to get back together.
- If you sense they are uneasy, try to guess how they feel about separation. Ask “Are you:
  - Scared?”
  - Sad?”
  - Angry?”
- Tell your child “Remember that I will always come back.”

**Don't try to explain why there's a need for separation.** It's tempting to try to get the child to understand why you may need to be apart from them (school, work, etc.), but no rationale helps when a child is emotionally upset. Focus more on how you both feel about the separation.

**Put a cloth that smells like you (it can be a t-shirt you've worn to bed) and a photo of the two of you in their backpack.** Let them know it's there, and if they are having trouble during the day, they can look at the picture or smell the cloth.

## Coming Back Together

**When you see your child after separation, immediately scoop them into your arms for a hug.**

- Show them you are excited to see them!
- Do not give up if they push away, but say how that makes you feel
  - I feel so sad when you push me away.
  - It hurts my heart when you push me away. I've missed you so and want to be close again.
- Prioritize reconnecting with your child one-on-one. Unpacking the backpack or tending to chores can wait. You will find even a few minutes of your undivided attention goes a long way toward reconnection.

**Describe your feelings during separation and guess how they may be feeling.**

- I missed you so much today!
- I was so sad we couldn't be together today. Were you sad?

**Apologize for the separation, even if it's not your fault. Remember, it's not about assigning blame, apologizing shows your child that you empathize with their feelings.**

- I'm so sorry I had to leave you to go to work.
- I'm so sorry I had to leave you to take care of [your brother/sister/loved one].

**Maintain close physical contact with continued deep emotional expression for as long as needed to reach mutual calm and connection.**