

Separation Anxiety and Transitions

During the coronavirus lockdown children that usually attend nursery may be having different experiences. They will have experienced a change to their regular routines and may also be missing the relationships and adventures they have at nursery. Regardless of how children have spent their lockdown they will need supporting to make the transition back into their regular routines and patterns, and re-establishing friendships and relationships. The information and advice in this factsheet is aimed to assist parents and children during this time and help a smooth transition back to nursery when they fully reopen.

What is separation anxiety?

The NHS describe separation anxiety as a fear, in young children, of being separated from their primary carers which is most common between the ages of six months and three years. This is a normal part of a child's development and children usually grow out of it. This is often displayed by tearful goodbyes when you as a primary carer may try to leave the room or leave them to be cared for by a relative or at nursery. Although unsettling, with a few support strategies many children will soon settle. You may have already gone through these stages when your child first started at nursery. However, separation anxiety can affect anyone at any time and is especially common after significant events for example transitions, divorce, moving to a new house; and/or traumas including a death of a close family member or abuse. The coronavirus lockdown and changes in most children's day to day lives, may see an increase in the number of children experiencing separation anxiety. Separation anxiety can be displayed through children's feelings and behaviours. These may include:

- Clinginess to primary carer, e.g. Mum and Dad
- Tears/upset/extreme tantrums
- Sickness
- Withdrawal e.g. not wanting to join in with activities
- Disruptions around sleep/nightmares
- Food refusal
- Inappropriate behaviour
- Regression, for example toilet accidents.

How to support children through separation anxiety?

During this lockdown period, I know that some of the staff have tried to keep in contact with you and your children to continue the great relationships you have, including online stories, sharing photos on our Facebook page and activity ideas. These will all provide a great foundation to build on when children fully return. Some other ideas may include:

- Always saying goodbye to your child when they leave them at nursery again rather than just disappearing (however hard it may be) and telling them when you will be back
- Enabling your child to take a comforter to the setting or something of yours, for example a scarf, that may offer reassurance to the child
- If possible, you could collect your child a little early to begin with.
- Share key milestones and photos of what your child has achieved during lockdown e.g. learnt to walk, say new words, learnt a new song; so these can all be celebrated at nursery and used to help your child feel safe and secure again at nursery.

We will be offering your child lots of safe open-ended experiences with cosy areas during this transition period as well as lots of stories, songs and down time to help ease the transition. Time outdoors will also be important to help them feel safe and secure through this transitional time. There are lots of activities around relieving anxiety that you may also like to try at home including mind jars, rain shakers and sensory tubes, which may also be helpful. Activities or stories where children can talk about and express their feelings may be effective too. There are lots of ideas available online.

A mind jar is a meditation tool to use whenever a child feels stressed, overwhelmed or upset. Imagine the glitter as your thoughts. When you shake the jar, imagine your head full of whirling thoughts, then watch them slowly settle while you calm down. All you need is a jar, glitter glue, food colouring and warm water. Mix them all together and use with children to help them feel calm.

Talk to your child about the transition back, ask them how they are feeling and try to offer lots of reassurance. Talk about all the things they use to enjoy and what they will be able to do again including playing with their friends.

The lockdown time has been an unprecedented time for everyone so try not to worry about the gaps in your child's learning and assessment records during this period. Share as much information as you can with us about their interests and key milestones, so we can begin to further support your child. The coronavirus has caused change and uncertainty for many of us. It is going to take time for children to settle again but please rest assured that the staff here at Bell House will achieve this challenge through the love they provide for the children and the amazing activities and experiences we will be offering them

Please feel free to call your child's room throughout the day to discuss any worries you may be having to help ease the transition for both you and your child.