

# Common Separation Anxiety Behaviors at Home (And What You Can Actually Do About Them)

## 1. The Velcro Child

**Expect:** Clinging to your body, shadowing you around the house, panic when you walk away.

**Try:**

- Build **short, safe separations** (e.g. “I’ll be in the laundry room for 2 minutes. Wanna set a timer?”).
  - Use **“when–then” bridges**: “When I finish this call, then we’ll play together.”
  - Praise **any independence** like it’s a Nobel Prize.
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## 2. Bedtime Meltdowns

**Expect:** Refusing to sleep alone, sneaking into your bed at night, elaborate stalling rituals.

**Try:**

- Create a visual bedtime plan — same steps, every night.
  - Gradual withdrawal: start close, then move further away each night.
  - Offer a transitional object: a soft toy, a “hug from you” token, a picture.
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## 3. Morning Drop-Off Dread

**Expect:** Screaming, crying, refusing to get dressed, clinging at the door.

**Try:**

- Keep goodbyes **short and predictable** — no negotiations, no last-minute bribes.
  - Use a **“brave plan”**: review steps of goodbye, school, and reunion.
  - Create a goodbye ritual: a special handshake, a kiss in the palm, a “see-you-soon” note.
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## 4. Somatic Complaints (“I feel sick”)

**Expect:** Headaches, stomachaches, phantom fevers on school days.

**Try:**

- Validate feelings (“It’s hard to go when you’re worried”), then continue the plan.

- Help your child learn to **track real vs. worry-body symptoms**.
  - Reward bravery, not absence of fear.
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## 5. Calling/Texting from School

**Expect:** Frequent check-ins or even school refusals.

**Try:**


- Limit contact (e.g., one scheduled check-in) and phase it out slowly.
  - Send a **connection item**: photo in the backpack, note in the lunchbox.
  - Work with school on a calm-down plan or safe person.
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## The Honest Truth About What You'll Probably Do (And Why You're Still a Great Parent)

Let's normalize *you*, too. Parenting a child with separation anxiety will test your patience, break your heart, and challenge your routines. You will...


### 1. Cave to the Crying

Because it's easier. Because they *seem* like they're in pain (they kind of are).

 **Fix it:** Start again tomorrow. You didn't ruin anything.


### 2. Stay Too Long

You just want to make sure they're really okay.

 **Fix it:** Shorten it next time. Set a boundary with yourself, not just them.


### 3. Blame Yourself

You'll think, "Maybe if I'd been tougher... or more comforting... or less stressed."

 **Fix it:** Remember — anxiety is not a parenting flaw. It's a treatable condition, and your support is already helping.

### 4. Cry in the Car After Drop-Off

Join the club. You're allowed to feel this.

 **Fix it:** Deep breath. Call a friend. Drive through for a coffee and a moment of peace.

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## How to Parent the Child You Have (Not the One You Imagined)

- **Resist rescuing** — comfort, don't enable.
  - **Celebrate bravery** — not perfection or ease.
  - **Talk about anxiety like a visitor**, not a villain: "That's just Worry Brain talking again."
  - **Anchor routines** with visuals, music, or rituals.
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## You're Not Going to Ruin Them

You're going to say the wrong thing. You'll comfort too long, or leave too fast. You'll get frustrated. And still — you're the safest place in the world for your child.

What they'll remember is:

- That you stayed calm (even if it was fake calm).
  - That you believed in their bravery.
  - That you *came back* — every time.
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## Extra Parenting Tips by Situation

### Transitions

- Preview what's coming ("In 10 minutes, I'm going to shower, and you'll stay with Daddy.")
- Use timers and visual clocks.

### Sleep

- Same routine. Every night. No exceptions.
- Use audio books, nightlights, and transitional objects.

### School

- Partner with the teacher. Share your goodbye script and calm-down plan.
- Ask for visual schedules or a "bravery badge" system.

### Outings Without Them

- Practice mini-leavings (walk the dog, run to the mailbox).

- Leave a "you're in my heart" token behind.
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## Final Note to You, Brave Parent

You didn't cause this. You can't control it. But you *can* guide your child through it. Slowly. Compassionately. Imperfectly.

Your job isn't to eliminate the fear — it's to walk beside them until they learn they can handle it.

And you? You're already doing that.

This isn't about being a perfect parent. This is about being a **present** one — even if that means peeling a child off your leg at 7:59 AM with mascara running down your cheek and a granola bar in your teeth.

You've got this. And they've got you.