

## 09 Early years practice procedures

### 09.10 Separation anxiety information

Separation anxiety occurs when toddlers do not feel securely attached to their key person. Taking steps to reduce anxiety and promote attachment is a priority task for the key person in partnership with the parent/carer.

- Separation anxiety can be identified when signals are clearly understood by members of staff.
- Distress in children produces high levels of corticosteroids (neurochemicals) which hinder brain functioning. It is detrimental for children to experience prolonged distress. Signals include:
  - crying inconsolably for extended periods; causing coughing or difficulty to breath or vomiting
  - holding breath
  - head banging or rocking
  - ambivalent feelings towards the key person, i.e. wanting to be picked up then struggling free
  - frantic movement or lashing out with arms and legs
  - biting, tantrums and snatching from others
  - jealousy shown towards other children in the key group
  - refusing food or drink or showing signs of digestive problems
  - temporary interest in toys or others, then crying again
  - prolonged periods of sleep
  - switching off, staring blankly
  - anxiousness about who is coming in and out of a room, standing by the door for long periods
  - being held, but not responding or smiling
  - crying when the parent/carer collects or cheering up and eager when the parent/carer collects
- A picture of evidence builds up which may suggest that the child is experiencing separation anxiety. This needs to be discussed with the parent/carer and a plan made to help the child settle.
- The parent/carer and key person discuss the reasons that the separation anxiety has developed or been made worse. It could be due to:
  - hurried settling-in due to pressures on parents/carers
  - inadequate settling in due to the key person being absent or the child not being brought in each day to complete the settling-in plan
  - the key person's absence during settling in period

- changes of staff
- part time attendance not allowing sufficient continuity for the child to become familiar with the surroundings and to make an attachment to the key person
- change of key person in the pre-school
- changes at home – stress events in the family
- child's illness
- family having been away on holiday
- previous distressing experiences with another pre-school
- The goal of any plan is to ensure the child is secure through forming an attachment with the key person.
- The settling in process is reviewed; if any aspect has been missed, this is re-planned. This may include the need for the parent/carer to stay or find a close relative or friend whom the child feels safe with if the parent/carer cannot be there.
- A child who will be attending on a part-time basis will need to come in daily until they are familiar and beginning to settle.

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