

Coping Mechanisms

In the midst of anxiety caused by separation, encourage your child to try the following:

- Reassurances that separation, or being away from home/the person they find comfort in, is only temporary
- 5-4-3-2-1 technique
 - Name 5 things that they can see
 - Name 4 things that they can touch
 - Name 3 things that they can hear
 - Name 2 things that they can smell
 - Name 1 thing that they can taste
- Breathing exercises:
 - Take a slow deep breath in through the nose
 - Hold for 2 seconds
 - Breathe out slowly from the mouth
 - Wait 5 seconds and repeat until feeling calmer
- Blowing bubbles can also help as a panic-reducing breathing exercise
- Physical exercises:
 - Tense and hold the muscles in the body, as tightly as they can, and then release. Repeat until the body is feeling more relaxed
 - Pushing a wall away – ask your child to stand in front of a solid wall and tell them to push the wall away. As hard as they can, for as long as they can, and hold it. When they stop pushing, their muscles will relax. Repeat as necessary
- Counting:
 - Counting out loud can help, but instead of counting in order, ask your child to repeat numbers out of order. Brains are used to the familiarity of them being in order, and when they are said out of order, it can confuse the brain enough to calm them down
- Eating sour sweets – eating sour sweets can make the brain shift its focus from panic to focusing on the senses – this confusion can help ease panic

Separation Anxiety Coping Mechanisms



The Lotus Mental Health

www.thelotusmentalhealth.org

What is Separation Anxiety?

Separation anxiety is a type of anxiety disorder that makes people feel extreme levels of fear and worry when they are away from the people, places, or things that make them feel safe. These can be family members, friends, their home – or other safe space, or items of comfort such as a blanket.

Separation anxiety can occur at any time when a person is away from anything that provides comfort, or that they are attached to in some way.

Most people miss the people they love and care about when they are away from them, and it's perfectly natural to feel this way. However, for a person with separation anxiety disorder, that missing, turns into fear, panic, worry, and fear.

What can you do?

Because it's almost impossible to be with the person/people/place you find comfort in all of the time, it can be beneficial for both you and your child(ren) to have coping mechanisms in place to deal with their panic and anxiety when separation is inevitable.

It is important to find what works for you and your child, so here are a few examples to get your started...

Coping Mechanisms

If your child(ren) are feeling anxious, there are things that you can encourage your child to do that can help them. They are:

- Nobody should go through difficult times alone, and this is something that your child needs to learn to understand, because of this, it is important for your child to learn how to open up to people about how they are feeling. A parent, carer, brother, sister, grandparent, auntie, uncle, cousin, a trusted friend, a counsellor – it doesn't matter who, as long as your child feels comfortable talking to someone who they trust, about how they are feeling.
- Encourage your child to get the thoughts that are in their head – out. An effective way that they can do this by keeping a diary. Simply writing down how they are feeling can be really useful. Not only will that work because it helps them put a place for their negative thoughts, but it can also be used as a point of reference for any particular anxiety triggers that they didn't realise they had.
- Writing a letter – this might seem a bit daft, but if they can write letters to themselves, particularly after particular difficult anxiety attacks, they can use the letters to read back and see themselves, through their own words, that they have overcome anxiety attacks in the past, and therefore they know that they are capable of overcoming them.