

1.14 Managing separation anxiety in children



Separation anxiety occurs when babies and 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.

- 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 babies 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 collects or cheering up and eager when parent 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 and a plan made to help the child settle.
- The parent and key person discuss the reasons that the separation anxiety has developed or been made worse. It could be due to:
 - *inadequate settling in due to the key person being absent or the baby 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 baby to become familiar with the surroundings and to make an attachment to the key person*
 - *change of key person in the setting*
 - *changes at home – stress events in the family*
 - *baby's illness*
 - *family having been away on holiday*
 - *previous distressing experiences with another setting*
- 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 needs to be re-planned. This may include the need for the parent to stay or find a close relative or friend whom the child feels safe with if the parent cannot be there.
 - A child who will be attending on a part-time basis might need a longer settling in period, therefore the manager and key person will discuss with parents a plan considering the child's individual needs.