

Separation Anxiety

Children frequently experience anxiety or worry when separated from their loved ones, which is a normal reaction. For the siblings and offspring of people with CF, this separation is sometimes unavoidable and can add additional stress to already challenging times.

Every child is unique, so when supporting a child facing challenges with separation, it's important to tailor your approach to their individual needs. There are several strategies to assist children with separation anxiety.

Preparation is key

Although it can be hard to anticipate, where possible, discuss any upcoming changes and acknowledge how your child is feeling. The best time to prepare a child for separation is when it is not immediately occurring and can be incorporated into everyday conversation and stories.

If separation is sudden, try to keep routines consistent, encourage them to express their feelings, and try to create a stable environment.

Practical strategies

Practice separations

Ideally, start with brief separations, gradually increasing their duration. Reuniting frequently after short breaks can reassure them that longer separations are manageable and that they can be ok without you.

Positively reinforcing how your child is managing this separation will support them to feel more confident in their ability to cope.



Use social stories

Social stories are short, personalised narratives that explain social situations, concepts, and skills. They use descriptive, positive language and imagery to help children understand what to expect.

There is a wealth of guidance on creating social stories online. You can also find free templates that can be personalised or use an existing story like [this one](#).

Consider keepsakes

A photo, blanket, favourite book, or small item with your scent can provide comfort by helping your child feel closer to you and can be especially helpful when they feel uneasy about being apart.

Countdown calendar

Reassuring your child that their loved one will return soon can also be beneficial in alleviating their anxiety. You could provide them with a countdown calendar or a jellybean jar to count down the days until they see their loved ones again.

Distraction

Encourage your child to work on a project whilst you are away that they can tell you about over the phone or show you when you get home. Giving your child something else to focus on may help them feel less lost and more in control.

Stay connected

Regular, meaningful check-ins can reassure loved ones of your ongoing support. Agree on the communication strategy before you go away. Some children like being able to videocall every day before bed. For other children this can be too distressing and a phone call at breakfast or texts might be more appropriate. Work out what this looks like for you and your child.

Look forward

If possible agree on a fun activity/dinner/movie that you will do together when you come home. Make a poster about it before you go and put it on the fridge! Talk about how you're looking forward to the activity whilst you're away and make sure to remember to do it when you return!

CFWA support

CFWA can provide emotional support for parents, carers, and children experiencing stress or anxiety with separation. We have resources and activities to help children feel connected while apart from loved ones including The Invisible String book and matching bunnies. We can also provide referrals to counselling, play therapy, or peer support programs where appropriate.