## Separation Anxiety: 15 Ways to Ease Your Child's Fears by Cathryn Tobin, MD, author of The Parent's Problem Solver

Separation anxiety is a little one's way of saying how much they really don't want to say good-bye. Most preschoolers and grade-schoolers experience it at some point in their early lives. Sometimes it occurs out of the blue after a change in the environment. Other times separation anxiety occurs because children are worried about life at home -- perhaps because parents are fighting or someone is sick -- and they feel a sense of uncertainty about leaving home. Most often, however, separation anxiety is purely a "missing mom" issue. Follow these 15 strategies and you may be able to minimize the problem too.

DO: Keep your good-byes short and sweet. In doing so, you convey the message that you have confidence in your child's ability to cope.

DON'T: Hover around. Your child will sense your anxiety, and this will make it more difficult for her to calm down.

DO: Tuck a family picture away in your child's backpack for her to look at later in the day.

DON'T: Sneak out. You want your child to know unequivocally that she can trust you.

DO: Develop loving good-bye routines. Madison and I invented a kiss-hug-nose-rub routine that we both enjoy.

DON'T: Bargain or bribe your child to behave. Your little one should be allowed her feelings.

DO: Send clear messages. Your child needs to know that you expect him to go to school no matter how much he fusses, cries or stamps his feet.

DON'T: Take your child home. If you do, you send the message that if your child cries enough he won't have to stay.

DO: Invite children from the class over, so your child can forge friendships that will make the transition easier.

DON'T: Get upset. By keeping an upbeat and positive attitude about your child's school, teacher and friends, you'll help your child feel safe and enjoy his time at school.

DO: Ask your spouse or another family member to take a turn dropping your child off, or pick up one of your child's classmates on the way to school, and your problems may disappear.

DON'T: Discuss problems with the teacher in the morning. Save conversations and questions for the end of the day.

DO: Involve the teacher. You need someone on the other end who will greet your child and ease the transition.

DON'T: Be surprised if you solve the problem and it reoccurs after holidays and sick days.

DO: Believe in your child's ability to make positive changes.