



# BABLER FAMILY MATTERS

ROCKWOOD SCHOOL DISTRICT

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## NEW BEGINNINGS...Simple or Challenging?

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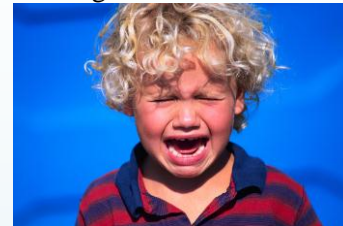
It's that time again...time for the beginning of a brand new school year! Since new beginnings are a time of change and transition they are likely to cause feelings good and not so good. For some children and adults, new beginnings are simple, refreshing, and create feelings of excitement, enthusiasm, and anticipation. These individuals may see a new beginning as "out with the old and in with the new." The new beginning of a school year may bring joy to children who are ready to go back to school, eager to see familiar faces, make new friends, and meet their new teacher.

However, for other children and adults, new beginnings can be much more challenging. New beginnings disrupt the comfort of current routines, and may cause anxious thoughts, fears, and worries of what lies ahead. Such children may be dreading the start of the school year. They may be fearful or worried and may verbalize or demonstrate their negative feelings about the new school year.

It is important to recognize that when children are faced with any new situation, such as the start of a new school year, it is typical and reasonable for them to experience feelings and concerns. For example, many children wonder and even worry about who will be in their class, if they will have a friend, or what their teacher will be like. Hopefully, these thoughts and feelings can be addressed by talking with a trusted adult.



However, when a child's worries are so strong that they impact a child's daily functioning and cause him/her to avoid the approaching change at almost any cost, there is cause for concern. More specifically, when school begins, children who are overwhelmed with feelings of worry and fear may act out by tantruming, clinging, or refusing to separate from a caregiver.



### Separation Anxiety

Separation anxiety is a normal phase of development for babies. It occurs among even healthy, secure babies. Separation anxiety typically appears at about eight months and increases until thirteen to fifteen months, when it starts to decline. During this stage of development babies become aware that they can be separated from their caregiver. They do not understand that the caregiver can return nor do they understand the concept of time. Therefore, crying when separating from the caregiver is a normal anxious reaction.

However, this same type of panicked reaction to separation in a school age child can be concerning for parents as well as for school personnel. Separation anxiety during school age is characterized by a child's irrational fear of leaving the safety of their parents and their home. Children may worry that a parent may become ill or hurt while they are away from them. Children may also be fearful about something in the new environment.

Prior to and during an attempt to separate, children experiencing separation anxiety may tantrum, panic, and complain of feeling ill (nausea, headaches, stomach aches, and diarrhea). Symptoms seem to be strongest in the morning and are likely to appear after an illness, weekend, or holiday break. A child will usually insist that he/she is truly ill in an effort to stay home.



However, if the child stays out of school, it may become increasingly difficult for him/her to return to school. Parents often feel conflicted about whether their child is experiencing a real physical illness or if the ill feelings are related to the child's emotional response to attending school. It is advisable to contact school personnel (school counselor, school nurse, and your child's teacher) as well as your family physician (to rule out something physical).

If separation anxiety becomes long term, it can impact a child's emotional, social, and academic growth. A child's development of self-confidence may be delayed and he/she may have difficulty making new friends. Frequent absences can create a lack of belonging to the class as well as gaps in academic progress.

When a pattern of separation anxiety occurs it is important for families and schools to partner together. A team comprised of a child's parents and school personnel such as the school counselor, teacher, school nurse, and principal can work together to investigate what may be causing the child's difficulty with separating. Sometimes a child's anxiety may be linked to a specific situation (or change) at home such as conflict, separation or divorce, death or loss, moving, a new caretaker, a new work schedule or change in routine, financial struggles, trauma, or an unexpected situation or tragedy.

Similarly, a child may also be having school related worries about new situations such as riding the bus, eating in the cafeteria, using the bathroom, making friends, conflict with peers, bullying, or asking adults for help. Once some of the possible causes have been identified and discussed, together the parents and school can create a plan to support the child.

## When Saying "Goodbye" is Challenging



Saying "goodbye" and separating can be very difficult for both children and adults. When children demonstrate an emotional response such as crying or clinging to a parent, it can make the situation even more challenging. The following are some tips to help create a calmer separation:

- ❖ Pre-set your child for the approaching separation. Let him/her know when and where you will be separating, where you are each going, and why. Explain that he/she **must** go to school and that you have other responsibilities that you must handle.
- ❖ Do NOT give in to pleas to stay home. This will make separating more difficult in the long run.
- ❖ Establish a morning routine. Routines create a sense of security and stability and allow children to know exactly what to expect each morning. You may want to consider writing down the routine and posting it.
- ❖ Keep "goodbyes" short. Give your child a hug/kiss, say "bye" and tell your child that you will see him/her later. Walk away while sending your child on his/her way.
- ❖ Give your child something special of yours to keep in his/her pocket as a reminder of Mommy's/Daddy's love.
- ❖ Share your feelings with your child. Explain that you miss your child too. Share how you handle your feelings.
- ❖ Give your child a picture of you and him/her together (to keep in his/her backpack). Explain that this is a way for you to be together while you are apart.
- ❖ If a child works hard to separate calmly, praise his/her effort.
- ❖ Enhance motivation by establishing a reward system for smooth separations.
- ❖ Ask your child's teacher or counselor about giving your child a morning job or responsibility and a classroom buddy.
- ❖ Talk to your child about his/her feelings about school (and anything else) regularly. Encourage and model the use of a feelings vocabulary.
- ❖ Put a short note of reassurance in your child's lunch box.
- ❖ If you are concerned, contact your school counselor ASAP.



## Read About It

The following are some children's books that address separation anxiety issues:

[The Kissing Hand](#), by Audrey Penn

[When Fuzzy Was Afraid of Losing his Mother](#), by Inger Maier

[Mom, Dad, Come Back Soon](#), by Debra Pappas

[When I Miss You](#), by Cornelia Spelman



### **Please Give Change A Chance!**

Whether change is simple or a challenge for you and your child, please remember to give change a chance. Adjusting to new situations such as a new school year takes time. Sometimes initial reactions to new situations are based solely on the unfamiliarity of the situation. If your child initially seems anxious or unsure about school, listen and validate your child’s feelings. Encourage your child to be open-minded. Explain that we need to give ourselves time in order to get used to anything new and that we need to get to know a situation or person before making judgments.

Teachers and students alike require time to get to know each other to establish relationships of mutual respect and trust. Check in with your child periodically and most likely, you will see your child’s feelings improve as he/she settles in to the routines of the new school year. However, if you still have concerns, contact your child’s teacher or counselor; that is what we are here for! **EVERYONE MATTERS AT BABLER!**



### **Counselor Highlights**

During August counselors will meet with all classes for counselor introduction lessons and to talk about safety and harassment.

Counselors will also invite all students who are new to the building to grade level new student meetings! This is an excellent opportunity to get to know new friends and to just become familiar with your new bulldog family. We have lots of fun in these groups while each child meets new friends, learns more about the “ins and outs” of Babler and gets to know all the important grown-ups your child will interface with. I can’t wait!

***Happy August and WELCOME BACK!***

