**Help Me Grow: How to lessen the stress of separation anxiety for infants and toddlers**

Separation anxiety is typical as infants and toddlers grow. It is a sign of attachment to caregivers, and expanding emotional and cognitive development. As a baby’s brain develops, she begins to understand that things exist even if she can’t see them. For example, if a toy is moved into another room, she understands that the toy is somewhere, just not in front of her. The same awareness happens with people, and especially parents and primary caregivers. This can lead to separation anxiety.

Separation anxiety is common for infants 9 to 18 months old. It typically eases around 2 years, but can continue to happen when a child feels stressed. Separation anxiety is often also stressful and difficult for the parent or caregiver. While a challenging time of development, there are ways for parents and caregivers to help ease a child’s separation anxiety. These strategies include:

* Helping the child adjust to new settings: Children can feel anxious when they go to a new place. Caregivers can help parents and children ease this stress by having the parent stay a while as the child is introduced to new surroundings and begins to explore. Separation anxiety should lessen as the child becomes more comfortable over time.
* Talking to the child about the day ahead: Preparing the child for time away is important. Parents can talk to the child about what to expect during the day. “Today, you are going to child care and I am going to work. I am going to drop you off at (care provider’s name) so you can play with your friends. After naptime, I will come to pick you up and we will go home.” Caregivers can help children with separation anxiety by also sharing what the child will do that day.
* Making goodbyes quick and simple: Long goodbyes can add to the stress of leaving. Parents can help their children transition to being away by developing a quick and simple goodbye routine, such as a hug or wave. Caregivers can help by using a welcome routine for the child each day after he says goodbye to his parent.

These resources offer additional information about easing separation anxiety:

* “Separation Anxiety in Children” – National Library of Medicine
* “How to Ease Your Child’s Separation Anxiety” – HealthyChildren.org by American Academy of Pediatrics
* “Separation Anxiety: 19 ways to ease your child’s fears (so you can both stop crying!)” – Today Parents

For more information about encouraging healthy development, visit www.helpmegrowmn.org.