



**Cheddar First School & Preschool**

*Where every child is at the heart*

## **Managing separation anxiety in children under 2 years old**

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



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- A picture of evidence builds up which may suggest that the baby/toddler 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:
  - hurried settling-in due to pressures on parents
  - 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 baby who will be attending on a part-time basis will need to come in daily until he/she is familiar and beginning to settle.