

# Excessive Attachment and Separation Anxiety in Children: Ideas Exchange

[www.kidsacademy.mobi](http://www.kidsacademy.mobi)

Attachment is important in a parent-child relationship as it builds a basis for a person's relationships as they grow up. As a preschool teacher, I have observed how children show their attachment to their parents and caregivers and how different it can be for each child. The COVID pandemic has surely affected children's attachment and anxiety in social situations; although some do feel enthusiastic about being outside or starting school, this is not the case for all children. So, we decided to dive into this issue and ask Kids Academy users about the challenges they have with separation anxiety and excessive attachment in their children.

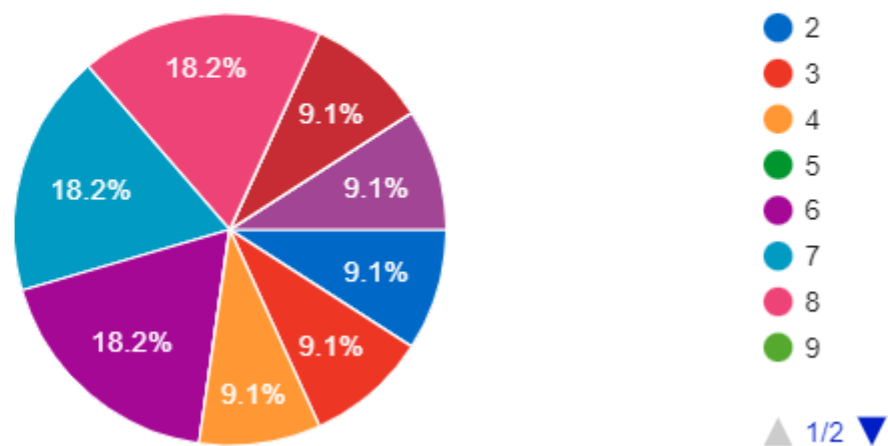


Hi, I am Jorezza—a teacher, behavioral therapist, and psychometrician. Working with children has always been my passion, and now helping parents is on my list too! In this article, I will provide commentary to your responses, answer your questions and will

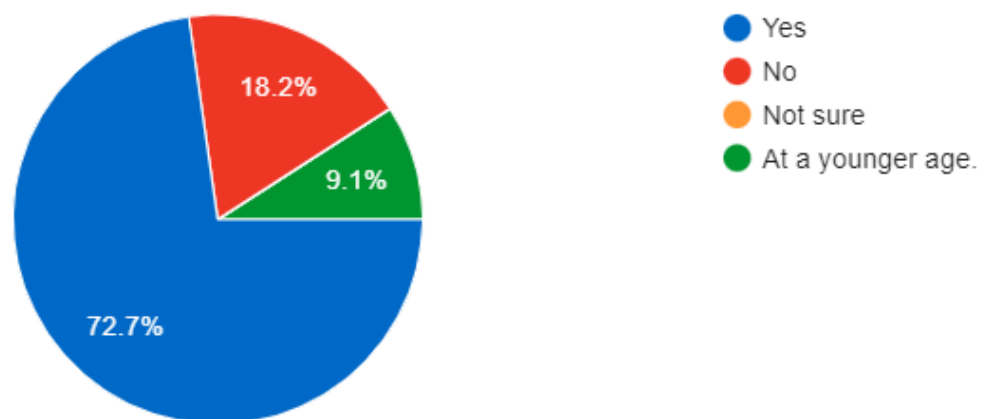
professionally discuss excessive attachment and separation anxiety in kids, as well as ways to address it.

Let's begin with an overview of the responses we received. The majority of our respondents have kids from 2 to 9 years old, and 73% of them reported noticing their child being overly attached to one parent or guardian. Most often, according to our users, it manifests in children's refusal to sleep alone, clinginess and being insecure or distrustful around others. It causes a whole spectrum of feeling in the caregivers—from happiness and feeling flattered to frustration and irritation, while the majority indicated that they find this situation worrisome.

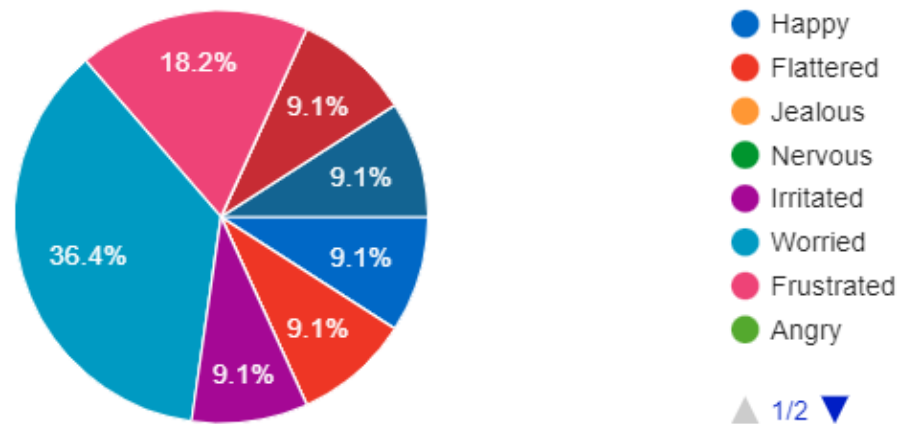
### 1. How old is your child?



### 2. Do you notice that your child is overly attached to one parent or other guardian?



4. How does excessive attachment of your child to one parent (or other guardian) make you feel?



3. What signs of excessive attachment and separation anxiety do you notice in your child?



## Basics

“What is the cause of excessive attachment and separation anxiety?” – asks Mr. On On.

In psychology, parent-child attachment is seen as the cornerstone of a child’s development. John Bowlby’s theory tells us that attachment begins in infancy—meaning that babies remember the people whom they feel safe with and get anxious around strangers. Also, Bowlby explains that a child’s attachment can affect their emotions, as well as cognitive and social skills in the future. In the early stages of life, children cannot say what they need. Therefore a parent will always try to be present whenever their child faces even the littlest inconvenience, to make them feel loved and protected. As a result

of this strong bond, you might experience your child being too attached to you, always looking for you and unable to stay by themselves.

Although attachment during the first few years is normal, it can later become a problem when the child needs to be away from the caregiver which may cause anxiety, fear of being abandoned and fear of others.

## Who experiences excessive attachment?

Excessive attachment is not only typical of toddlers, it can also manifest in elementary school children—this may happen when the parent is too available, making it difficult for a child to learn how to be alone. Some parents with children who are over 10 years old may still be experiencing this issue.

Separation anxiety, however, can happen even without excessive attachment and is more common in children. It is triggered by certain situations like being suddenly left alone, getting lost at a supermarket.

[Here's an important question from a parent of 7-year-old, "Our child has selective mutism how does this link to attachment issues?"](#)

Selective mutism is when a child does not communicate with other people or when in a specific situation, and it can be a sign of anxiety. Attachment issues and selective mutism may appear together in a child—I have seen children who, according to their parents, talk a lot at home, but are very reticent in class even when asked questions or during play. Selective mutism may or may not be a cause of an attachment issue, but it will be more helpful to ask a professional about it.

["Doesn't want to be left at school,"—Robin, a parent of a two-year-old.](#)

School is the most common place where we can witness excessive attachment as they will be with other people, and this situation can make them feel uncomfortable without having their caregivers around. I have seen three typical separation behaviors—one child will say bye to their mama and go straight to class, another one will be a bit more difficult with a lot of crying and tantrums but will eventually feel better after a little while, while a third kid will feel okay going inside the classroom but will start crying nonstop after a few minutes in the classroom—realizing that their caregiver has been gone for a long time.



At home, a child might exhibit excessive attachment behavior differently by not wanting to be alone or refusing to sleep in a different room, this is normal in younger kids but still needs to be addressed as the child gets older.

## 8 Major Points in Dealing with Excessive Attachment and Separation Anxiety

Dealing with this issue will not be the same to all parents, it will be a matter of how the child reacts to separation – some may throw tantrums, some may cry for a while but will feel better soon, and some do not show no reaction, but it does not mean that they are not experiencing separation anxiety.

[“Talk it out with your child.”](#)

[“Well, this child is my grandchild and when I’m home she will not let anyone deal with her except me and she worries the whole time she’s away from me even with her parents she worries about me, how can I help her?” –Melanie, grandparent of a 4-year-old.](#)

I love these answers from our Kids Academy users:

“Talking about when separation will happen so it's not a surprise, putting a stuffy or picture in his backpack to take to school, talking about what we're going to do together when he gets home, discussing strategies to take control of scary dreams and make them funny.” —Jennie.

“I try to verbally assure her.” —Sherry.

Jennie and Sherry have both shared wonderful ways to prevent the crying spells when the child is about to start school. Reassuring the child is important—stay with your child and wait for them to calm down then talk calmly. You may try saying things like “I understand that you are frustrated, but I will still be here, we will see each other later.” Always make the child feel understood.

Think of how we as adults also want to hear positive affirmations from others when we are anxious or nervous. Just the same as we worry when we can't see our children and think of all the things that can happen to them, our children get scared too.

Here is what you can do to help them:

1. Give the child a gift that they can always have when scared;
2. Try to lessen the bonding by giving more time doing other things than playing together—however, be careful not to make the child feel unwanted;
3. Encourage the child spend time with other members of the family;
4. Be emphatic and reassuring;

Jodi, a parent, asks, “My child's attachment to his dad is really security. He is unsecure when he is gone. He is jumpy and nervous and cries or screams for him. How can I help him?”

Some parents answered this amazingly:

“If it's minor, they will likely grow out of it. Anger and punishment only make things [worse] and most kids can't really be bribed out of anxiety. Remember a situation where you get extremely nervous and are compassionate. Help them understand it's okay to feel that way then help them work through it and do what they need to do anyway. Start very small. Baby steps. It's hard to go to school when your body is telling you to run away!” —Jennie, mom of an 8-year-old.

Children cannot deal with their feelings of worry and anxiety as effectively as adults can, since their brain is not as developed yet. Make sure that you listen and understand your child's needs, ask them why they are feeling a certain way and help them understand

their emotions. Reassuring your child and building their trust should be your priority. For instance, if you tell your kid that you will pick them up from school at a specific time, be there exactly at the agreed time to help them feel secure, safe and relaxed.

[Sisay, a parent of a 10-year-old, wisely suggests that attachments should be decreased step by step.](#) Sudden changes are not good, especially for a child, so dealing with separation anxiety at home is the first thing you can do. Listen to the kid's stories and worries and encourage them to come up with ideas of what can lessen their fears and worries—maybe she can hug his favorite blanket when he feels scared.



5. Be consistent;

[“Vary routines early,”—kb.](#)

I completely agree with this! Routines are vital for a growing child—they help to build their confidence and feel secure. Children build better habits when they follow a certain routine because they can predict what will happen, so it is important to let them know if there will be changes in their routines. When working in a routine, give them responsibilities and try not to give in all the time. My students always enjoy it when I give them assignments like ‘pack away patrol’, ‘chairs checker’, or ‘clock watcher’—it gives

them a boost of confidence that they can do things on their own! You can also try doing this at home.

6. Help them build better relationships;

Dr. Blue, a parent of a 2-year-old, asks, “Do children who have a stay-at-home parent suffer from separation anxiety more than children who go to daycare? Would enrolling in daycare help him to become more social with other people?”

Children with social practice e.g., daycare and playdates may be less likely to have excessive attachment compared to children who stay at home—and this is how the pandemic affected the issue. It is up to parents to help their child in having a connection to other kids or grown-ups (usually beginning with teachers or relatives). Make sure talk to inform other people about how to talk to your child, as well as their interests, and dislikes.

A parent of a 6-year-old, Haleemah, advises that parents “should try and study their children and understand them better,” and increase your relationship with other people. I love this answer because it speaks on how children are different from each other, therefore your child’s socialization will not be the same as others’. Trusting other people will never be easy, even for parents, but establishing trust in people whom the parents personally know will help the child have better relationships.

7. Continue bonding with your child;

Ina, a parent of a 3-year-old, encourages us to spend time with other family members, which also falls under bonding. Children are observant, they learn through observation, so it is important that you demonstrate to them a bond not just with themselves but with other family members too. Have some movie nights all together! And try to sit farther from your child.





Haleemah also asks, “As children grow, especially boys, how do you manage to keep them under close check?”

Secure attachment should be the goal! And bonding is the best way to it. Bonding is necessary to for your relationship to flourish and for your child to build trust. Mr. On On recommends “to have time with that kid by going with him/her for a walk, watching together what they want to watch at that time.” This is one great way to bond with your child!

Check our article on [Being a Good Parent](#) for a guide on forming a healthy attachment with your child.

8. Trust and patience.

“It doesn’t last forever”—Dr. Blue.

And that is so true. Trust the process—it might take longer for some but it always comes to an end. Trust in yourself as well; you are doing everything for your child and your concerns are valid. Ask help if needed; seek advice from other parents or a professional.

It might not be a success instantly, but you should not give up, just like Patience is significant when dealing with excessive attachment. You may want to try everything that

you can, some of which will work and some of which won't. [As Melanie wisely sums it up, "Hang in there,"](#) –and your effort will be rewarded!

#### References:

Cassidy J, Jones JD, Shaver PR. Contributions of attachment theory and research: a framework for future research, translation, and policy. *Dev Psychopathol.* 2013 Nov;25(4 Pt 2):1415-34. doi: 10.1017/S0954579413000692. PMID: 24342848; PMCID: PMC4085672.

[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why\\_attachment\\_parenting\\_is\\_not\\_the\\_same\\_as\\_secure\\_attachment](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why_attachment_parenting_is_not_the_same_as_secure_attachment)

Hong YR, Park JS. Impact of attachment, temperament and parenting on human development. *Korean J Pediatr.* 2012 Dec;55(12):449-54. doi: 10.3345/kjp.2012.55.12.449. Epub 2012 Dec 20. PMID: 23300499; PMCID: PMC3534157.

Brumariu LE, Kerns KA. Mother-Child Attachment and Social Anxiety Symptoms in Middle Childhood. *J Appl Dev Psychol.* 2008;29(5):393-402. doi: 10.1016/j.appdev.2008.06.002. PMID: 19122894; PMCID: PMC2574513.

<https://www.mother.ly/parenting/clingy-toddler-behavior/>

