

Helping Your Preschooler with Separation Anxiety at HELC

Tips for Parents & Caregivers of Children Ages 2–5

Starting preschool at **Highlands Early Learning Centre (HELC)** is an exciting milestone — and a big change for young children and their parents.

It's normal for children to feel nervous or upset during drop-off in the early days (and sometimes again after holidays or illness). With gentle preparation and consistent routines, most children adjust beautifully.

Before Your Child Starts at HELC

- **Visit HELC Together (Gradual Entry)**

During the last week before school starts, HELC teachers will create a welcome video for families to watch together at home. This is a great way for your child to see their teachers and classroom before arriving in person. During Gradual Entry, children and parents will also have the chance to see the classroom, meet teachers, and explore the playground together. Use this time to point out the entrances (Courtyard, Side Door, Playground, or Gym) and talk about what you see.

- **Talk Positively About Preschool**

Share what your child will do, see, and learn at HELC.

Example: “You’ll get to paint, build with blocks, play outside, and meet new friends!”

- **Practice Separations**

Play peek-a-boo, short hide-and-seek games, or role play drop-off and pick-up with toys.

- **Read Together**

Choose picture books about starting school and saying goodbye.

- **Create a Visual Story**

Make a small photo book showing your child getting ready, saying goodbye, and being picked up again.

- **Adjust Sleep Routines**

In the week or two before school, gradually move bedtime earlier so your child gets 10–12 hours of sleep.

On HELC Preschool Mornings

- **Keep the Mood Calm and Positive**

Talk about the fun things planned for the day.

- **Offer a Comfort Item**

Your child may bring a small familiar object (like a stuffie or matching bracelet) for the morning.

- **Make a Special Goodbye Ritual**

Use a hug and kiss, a high-five and wave, or a short silly handshake.

- **Have a Snack Before Drop-Off**

A small protein snack before leaving can help children feel calm and focused.

- **Remind Them of Reconnection**

Tell them what you’ll do after school:

Example: “After preschool, we’ll go to the playground and you can tell me your favourite part of the day.”

At HELC Drop-Off

- **Arrive on Time**
Arriving at the start of class helps your child settle with the group.
- **Stay Warm and Confident**
Children feel more secure when they sense your belief in their ability to manage.
- **Hand Them to a Teacher**
Make sure your child is with a caring HELC staff member before you leave.
- **Keep Goodbyes Short**
Lingering or sneaking away can make things harder. Smile, say goodbye, and go.
- **Trust Our Team**
HELC teachers are experienced in helping children settle and feel safe.

Helpful Things to Remember

- **Big Feelings Are Normal**
Tears, clinging, or even frustration are ways children express the need for reassurance.
- **Use Reassuring Words**
Instead of “Don’t cry” or “You’re fine,” try:
 - “I know you feel sad right now, and I’ll be back after snack time.”
 - “You are safe here, and your teacher will take care of you.”
- **Your Calm Helps Their Calm**
Children notice your body language and tone.
- **Adjustment Takes Time**
Some children adapt in days, others in weeks. Anxiety can return after holidays or illness — this is normal.
- **After Pick-Up**
Your child might be tired or emotional after a busy preschool morning. A snack, quiet play, or cuddle time can help them recharge.

♥ **At HELC, we know that separation can be challenging, and we’re here to support both you and your child. With patience, consistency, and encouragement, your child will learn that preschool is a safe, fun place — and that you will always come back.**