# **How to manage clingy behaviour in children post-pandemic**

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Several parents/caretakers struggling to deal with children who are exhibiting clingy behaviour, especially after the pandemic. This could be a child who refuses to leave a parent’s side in social spaces or is uncomfortable with their guardian moving out of sight.

Most adults see this behaviour as a fear of being away from their parents (separation anxiety) or a fear of interacting with strangers (stranger anxiety). However, I also see a child’s ‘clingy’ behaviour as a reflection of their heightened attachment with the parent, which has been further exacerbated during the pandemic, leaving children with no opportunities for regular play and interaction with others. The expression of clinginess by children can be difficult to manage, at most times. As a grandma and an early childhood educator, I would like to share some tips that can help you deal with this behaviour.

**1. Create a safe space for children**

When we look at our child’s problems through adult eyes, we see their clinginess as a red flag, or merely fussiness. However, remember that they’re children. It’s important to create a safe, non-judgemental space for them to be authentic with us.

Do not ignore or reprimand them for their clingy behaviour. Instead, encourage them to label their emotions by posing questions like,  “Are you unwilling to go because you are scared?” or “Is it bothering you that you might not be able to find me there?”

For instance, if the child is daunted by being in a room full of strangers, even if they are his or her peers, offering to be there for some time can be soothing for them.

**2. Validate your child’s feelings**

When your child expresses their need to be close to you, instead of pushing the child away or telling them that everything will be okay, acknowledge their feelings. Listen to what they have to say, and validate it.

Instead of saying, “You’ll be okay if you play with others” comfort them through statements like, “I understand you are scared and you don’t want to go. But, I need to go and do something and will be back to pick you up after story time”.

If the child is seeking stronger validation, you can also encourage them to keep their favourite toy or blanket – to provide them with emotional support.

**3. Give them a sense of independence**

Children like having a sense of predictability in their environment, so transitioning into new environments can be tricky for them. As a guardian, support them in preparing for such transitions by openly communicating with them.

Telling them what they can expect beforehand and co-creating a routine with them helps them feel grounded.

For instance, if you are visiting a new place, talk to them about the whereabouts of the place, what you’re planning to do there, or show them pictures or visit the venue of the location so they feel familiar with the new surroundings.

As the child grows, you can also practice social scenarios with them like how to approach another child or ask for something they may need. These interactions help give the child a sense of independence in an external environment.

**Conclusion:**

Clinginess, often, is prominent with young children and fades away as they mature but, a guardian’s support during this phase can prove to be wonderful for their growth.

Dealing with this behaviour might be uncomfortable, at times, and it’s okay. Pause and take a break from the feelings.

Try to understand what your child is seeking, and create a space for a dialogue with them. Acknowledge their emotions, and co-create a solution with them that empowers your child to be self-reliant.