

UNDERSTANDING STRANGER ANXIETY IN TODDLERS

Stranger anxiety doesn't just affect babies, it can persist and even resurface in toddlerhood. This is completely normal, and a healthy sign that your toddler is developing awareness about the world around them

WHAT IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE:

- **Hiding or clinging:** staying close to you, using you as a physical barrier to maintain distance.
- **Going quiet:** avoiding eye contact or refusing to engage.
- **Restlessness, fidgeting, irritability**
- **Crying or screaming fits:** in more extreme cases.



HOW TO HELP:

- **Prepare them with simple language.** Before a social situation, consider saying things like: *"We're going to meet someone new today, it's okay to feel a little shy. I'll be right here."*
- **Never force interaction.** Avoid pressuring your toddler to hug or go to someone they're uncomfortable with, even a relative. Let them approach in their own time.
- **Stay close and stay calm.** Your toddler takes cues from you. A relaxed, confident presence signals to them that the situation is safe.
- **Start small.** One or two new faces at a time, in a familiar setting where possible, is far less overwhelming than a busy social gathering.
- **Validate their feelings.** Instead of *"don't be silly,"* try: *"I can see you're feeling unsure, that's okay, I'm right here."*



STARTING CHILDCARE OR PLAYGROUP?



Being in a new environment, with unfamiliar faces and being separated from familiar caregivers can be a significant period of adjustment for many children.

Give your child time to adjust. Settling in can take days to weeks. Work closely with teachers and caregivers, and know that most toddlers do settle with time and consistency.

NOTE:

If a relative feels hurt by your toddler's reaction, reassure them that it's not personal. The best thing everyone can do is give your toddler space and let them warm up at their own pace. With patience and consistency, they'll get there.

