

## Tokens of love relieve separation anxiety



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Little Ying, at the start of the new school year, would sit on the sofa outside the school hall every day, crying and saying her stomach hurt, while tightly gripping her mother's hand. Psychological experts believe this is a characteristic of children suffering from separation anxiety. If parents want to reduce their children's anxiety, one method is to help the children through "tokens". Why can these "tokens" be effective? The author attempts to explain the underlying mechanism from the perspective of child psychological development.

### The Invisible Sense of Security

The cognitive development theory proposed by the modern child psychologist Jean Piaget can explain the underlying principle. In the first stage (0-2 years old) of the theory, children can learn to search for hidden objects. This behavior indicates that children have learned the concept of object permanence - even if the object cannot be seen, they still know that it exists, so they will try to find it.

In the second stage (2-7 years old), Piaget believes that children can use language and symbols as representations. For example, children can use the word "dog" to represent an animal with four legs, a tail, and a "woof woof" sound. When children go to school, they experience a similar situation to the first stage, but they do not cry because they cannot see their mothers, but because they cannot generate the sense of security that they had when with their mothers. To overcome this, children need to use their ability to use language and symbols as representations. However,

effectively expressing the parent-child relationship in symbolic form is very difficult, and "tokens" are an effective auxiliary tool.



### Visualizing Relationships

Tokens can appear in various forms in daily life, such as the traditional Chinese talisman for safety, the Christian cross in the West, or even wedding rings. Using the traditional wedding ring as an example, the material and circular shape of the metal establish a "visual representation" of a steadfast marriage. This "visualization of the relationship" not only has an outwardly evident function, but it also makes it easier for the individual to recall the existence of the relationship. Applying this to the parent-child relationship, parents can use "tokens" to express their love, allowing the child to constantly remember them and thereby develop confidence and a sense of security.

### Patience, Determination, and Carefulness

When parents use "tokens" to assist their children, they must keep three key "mindsets" in mind. Firstly, establishing a relationship symbolized by the "token" takes time, and parents must have the patience to train their children. One type of training is through treasure hunt games, which can strengthen the child's understanding of object permanence and the feelings of possession and loss. This can help reduce the child's anxiety when faced with separation. Additionally, parents can establish a unique ritual with the child to accompany the token during times of separation, such as a goodbye kiss or a gentle high-five, which can also help the child transition through the separation process.



Secondly, there is determination. Parents may also experience separation anxiety, which can make it difficult for the child to learn about separation. If parents want their children to grow, they must be determined to separate from them when the child reaches school age, and trust in the school's care and the child's ability to adapt.

Finally, it is crucial to carefully preserve the token, lest all the previous efforts be in vain.